

Research Report

Learning, life and work: Understanding non- completion of industry qualifications

Report prepared for the
Industry Training Federation and Ako Aotearoa
By Anne Alkema, Heather McDonald and Nicky Murray
Heathrose Research Ltd

LEARNING, LIFE AND WORK: UNDERSTANDING NON-COMPLETION OF INDUSTRY QUALIFICATIONS

Authors

Anne Alkema, Heather McDonald and Nicky Murray

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Executive Summary

This research explores the reasons why some industry trainees do not complete their qualifications. It was undertaken between November 2014 and May 2015 to support on-going efforts to consider interventions to improve the rates of qualification completion by industry trainees and apprentices. It brings the voices of non-completing trainees and apprentices to inform the narratives on qualification completion in industry training.

Key conclusions

There is scope to increase the qualification completion rates in industry training and many of the potentially effective interventions to do this are relatively simple:

- Employers: show interest in training and learning; have time to train; know how to train; are able to explain what has to be done and how; provide time to practise at work; provide time for bookwork at work.
- ITOs: provide information about qualification requirements, including assessments; provide more materials and assessments that are relevant to the job; provide guidance and support.
- There is a fundamental issue for trainees having to complete self-directed study in their own time, both in terms of the time it takes and in understanding the assessment requirements.
- While 40 percent of trainees expressed disappointment at giving up on their qualification, a similar proportion felt relieved that they had stopped training.
- There is a challenge to the wider industry training system about how to better support employer capability and capacity to provide effective learning environments in the workplace.

Context

In 2014, the five-year cohort qualification completion rate for trainees was 42 percent and 51 percent for apprentices (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2015). While policy changes from 2011 onwards have looked to address non-completion, and there has been some small improvement (ibid), it nevertheless remains of interest to ITOs and government.

The literature provides evidence about the reasons for non-completion, but little attention has been paid to gathering the views of non-completing trainees where they are more talked 'about' than talked 'to'. To gain insight into their world, this research gathered the views of 114 non-completing industry trainees and apprentices¹ about their reasons for and the factors that contributed to the non-completion of their qualifications.

¹ In this report these 'non-completing apprentices/trainees' are referred to as 'trainees'.

Industry training

Industry trainees' learning and assessment occurs in the workplace, in off-job settings and in their own time. Working towards a qualification requires the trainee, the employer and the ITO to work together to enhance the likelihood of completion.

The trainees in this study had been enrolled with an Industry Training Organisation (ITO) and were studying at Level 3 or 4 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) in 2014. They included a wide range of ages, ethnicities, previous qualifications, and experience of industry and employment in New Zealand.

On starting their qualifications, 80 percent of the trainees said they were motivated and 65 percent said they already had a National Certificate Level 3/4 or above, indicating many were not only ready, but also able to undertake the qualification they had enrolled for. On the whole, trainees also thought their employers were reasonably positive about training and qualifications.

However, the combination of learning, life and work means completion requires more than trainees being motivated and able. They work towards qualifications within the context of their employment (e.g. managing work place relationships, on-job training, pay and working conditions, employers' attitude to training) and the system (e.g. ITO training and assessment, the labour market, economic climate). In addition to their readiness and motivation, trainees' ability to complete is influenced by factors such as their personal or family circumstances, and their persistence and attitude.

Contributors to non-completion

When the employer, system and trainee factors are considered, this study found the employer factor made a slightly larger contribution to non-completion than did system or trainee factors. The employer factor includes reasons such as: not getting the right sort of training and support, less than optimal workplace environments, and job loss.

Around a third of the trainees included personal circumstances or family commitments as one of their main reasons for discontinuing training. For some this was the tipping point in a training regime that had been less than optimal for them. This is not to say that nothing could have been done to better support these trainees. Those for whom 'life' was the main cause of non-completion commented they could have been helped to complete by some follow-up, support with their bookwork and time for that bookwork at work.

Twenty percent of trainees gave insufficient support as their main reason for not continuing. They saw support as coming from different sources – the workplace, where someone could take them through the workbooks or work alongside them, or from the ITO or the training provider.

Seventeen percent of the trainees made active decisions to leave training. These decisions occur when they are not motivated, want to try something else, move towns, or do not like the work.

Losing their job, not getting on with people at work, and low pay rates were given as reasons by fewer than 10 percent of the trainees. The small number who give low pay rates as the main reason

for non-completion is in keeping with other Australian and New Zealand research, but is in contrast to wider international literature.

However, the key point about non-completion is that the trainees' reasons are not straightforward and single-faceted. It is the interplay of factors with one of these acting as a tipping point that results in trainees withdrawing from their qualification. The concept of learning 'at' work was not so much their experience. Rather it was a case of learning 'on top' of work that made the burden of completing the qualification too much for them, and the drivers and incentives for completion were insufficient to override this burden. Nonetheless, the majority of trainees thought there was something that could have been done that may have resulted in them completing.

Relief or regret

How much did trainees care about ceasing their qualification? The extent to which the trainees felt relieved about or regretted not completing their qualification can help identify what and where interventions may be successfully targeted. The 39 percent who talked about training as being 'all too much' or as 'just too hard to continue' felt relief at giving up. The 40 percent who felt 'disappointed' or 'cared' portrayed a sense of regret. The trainees in the latter group were more likely to have moved on to new jobs and/or connected with other training opportunities. This suggests some trainees may still have had a level of motivation and drive to continue that perhaps could have been harnessed.

That said, those relieved at giving up had less motivation as by the time they gave up they were finding the combination of learning, life and work too much. Something had to give and the most viable option was to stop the training, and in so doing, relieve the burden this was placing on their time.

Actions to support qualification completion

In keeping with the idea that there are three parts to the training system, there are actions all three can take to support qualification completion.

Employer

The quality of training is underpinned by the extent to which there are people in workplaces with the capability and capacity to train, and the extent to which there is encouragement and support for training and the trainees generally. In terms of capacity constraints, trainees said they needed more opportunities to practise at work and more time for training. Availability, or capacity, was a key concern for the trainees in this study with 22 percent saying 'someone with more time at work to train me' is what would have helped them complete. This finding is not surprising given that around 40 percent of the trainees mentioned working in busy workplaces which resulted in little time for them to be shown what to do, let alone time for them to do their bookwork.

The trainees said that having someone who knew more about how to train and support them, more structured approaches to training, including mentoring in the workplace, employers who understood about learning at work, and experts in the workplace who could show them what to do, would have

helped them. These suggested improvements all relate to the capability of the workplace to conduct effective training.

System

Following the employment-related factors, trainees identified how the system could better support them. In relation to ITOs, this meant training materials, assessments and courses. What also needs to be considered is the wider labour market and the fact that just on 10 percent of the trainees had lost their jobs, the majority of them because firms had closed or there had been a downturn in business and they had been laid off.

The support these trainees need for bookwork calls into question this type of workplace learning and assessment for qualifications and the extent to which it either works for them or becomes a burden for them. The challenge for ITOs is to design and use assessment systems, practices and processes that adhere to the assessment principles of being timely, fair, authentic, valid and reliable, while at the same time keeping the approach manageable for themselves, the employers and the trainees. While current approaches work for around half of all industry trainees (as attested to by the MoE (2015) cohort qualification completion rates), on the whole, they did not work for the trainees in this study.

Trainee

Trainees were less likely to talk about personal factors that might have helped them to complete. This is of interest given personal decisions and/or circumstances were their most cited reasons for non-completion. Here, those who made comments noted the difficulty of the bookwork or their lack of personal motivation. They did not identify what might have helped in terms of their personal circumstances or family commitments. This suggests that they do not see how some intervention would have made a difference in relation to their life situation.

The solution

So, should employers, ITOs and the trainees themselves accept that this is just how it is, that these high rates of non-completion are a fact of life and that nothing can be done about it? The answer to this question is 'no'. This research concludes that more, although not all, trainees can continue when there are appropriate interventions to deal with the employer, system and trainee factors that impede qualification completion.

Largely the interventions recommended from this study relate to employer and system factors, but it is also worth considering the extent to which trainees are willing or able to utilise such interventions. This study, drawing on trainee experience, points to three recommendations for potential interventions:

- good practice in ITO administration of trainee engagement arrangements
- consideration of authentic and manageable assessment approaches for trainees
- support to create a positive on-job learning environment for trainees.

Where ITOs consider they already have these practices in place, consideration needs to be given to strengthening what is underway to better support those trainees for whom the learning and assessment process is too much on top of life and work.

Further, the underlying assumption that workplaces are capable and have the capacity to provide valuable learning experiences also requires further consideration. Future work to explore what good practice looks like within the work environment, to develop the skills and knowledge of trainees, would be a helpful addition to what is already known.

Background

New Zealand has a long history of vocational learning in the workplace. Apprenticeships in various trades have been formally regulated in New Zealand since 1894 (McLintoch, 1966; Murray, 2001). Since 1992, vocational learning in New Zealand has been mainly supported by Industry Training Organisations (ITOs), while a residual apprenticeship system has remained in the Polytechnic system. ITOs are responsible for setting standards and for arranging training, including the assessment for qualifications. They do not provide training themselves, rather they arrange for training and assessment to occur in the workplace, and in off-job settings. The number of ITOs has varied over time, from 52 in 1996 (MoE, n.d.) to 11 in 2015.

In addition to the reduction in the number of ITOs, there have been policy changes to the ways in which industry training is run in New Zealand. In 2011 a new set of funding rules was instigated following a register cleanout of inactive trainees in 2010. A strategic policy review between 2011 and 2012 led to an extension of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme to include apprentices of all ages and the scheme was rebranded as New Zealand Apprenticeships.² Changes have also been made to the funding mechanisms for employers, including opening up the arranging training role to non-ITOs (the Direct Funding Scheme).³

Introduction

In 2014 there were around 139,000 trainees and/or apprentices involved in on-job learning through ITOs (MoE, 2015). While policy changes from 2011 onwards, along with the removal of inactive trainees from the industry training register, have looked to address non-completion, it nevertheless remains a cause for concern. The MoE (2015) reports that while overall credit and qualification completion rates have improved since 2010, by 2014 the five-year cohort qualification completion rate for trainees was 42 percent (up from 37 percent in 2010), and for apprentices was 51 percent (up from 48 percent in 2010).

While the MoE reports on qualification completion rates, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) monitors the year-to-year completion rates of the tertiary education sector, including ITOs, using a suite of Educational Performance Indicators (EPI).⁴ The 2014 data show that, overall, ITOs had credit

² Apprenticeships are defined as training which results in a level four qualification consisting of a minimum of 120 credits.

³ Further information about funding arrangements for ITOs can be found at <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Funding/Fund-finder/Industry-Training-Fund/>

⁴ These indicators measure the credits achieved by trainees as a proportion of the total number of credits they are expected to complete in a given year. As such it shows the extent to which trainees are progressing towards programme completion and are retained in training. The indicators also measure the number of programmes, which are not necessarily full qualifications, as the measure includes Supplementary Credit Programmes (SCPs) being completed by trainees, as a proportion of the total number of credits arranged at each ITO. The EPI is thus an annual measure against

completion rates at Level 3-4 of the Qualifications Framework of 78 percent and programme completion rates of 71 percent.⁵

The question then for government, industry, employers and trainees in New Zealand is, 'Why are industry training qualification completion rates low?' Canada has similar rates of completion with estimates of around 50 percent (Davidson, 2014), as does Australia with completion rates of just over 55 percent for both trade and non-trade occupations (National Council for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), 2015). The Australian government has, however, recently announced a new Australian Apprenticeship Support Network to provide more support for apprentices and employers with a view to improving their completion rates (Australian Government, Department of Industry, 2014). The UK reports their completion rates at 72 percent for 2012/2013 (Skills Funding Agency and Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2014) and in Germany completion rates are between 75-80 percent (Ecorys, IES and IRS, 2013).

A second question for government, industry, employers and trainees in New Zealand is, 'Does completion really matter?' Overall, the research shows qualification completion in general is important for economic returns to the individual and the company (Mahoney, Park and Smyth, 2013; Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2013). Crichton (2009) found that gaining a workplace-based qualification at level 4 or higher increased earnings by an average of seven percent. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2011) also reported there were higher employment rates for those who completed apprenticeships and higher earnings. It is also important because of future productivity losses to employers and forgone tax revenue for governments when apprentices do not complete (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2013; Speckesser and Behling, 2013; Deloitte Access Economics, 2011).

Training completion is also important for employment stability. Crichton (2009) reports that 75 percent of those who complete a qualification are with the same employer at the end of their training period, with 50 percent of them being there a year later. This is compared to 25 percent of non-completers who were still with the same employer a year after their non-completion. Bednarz (2014) cites a NCVER 2010 study where 85 percent of completers were in employment nine months after completing their training as opposed to 60 percent of non-completers.

Conversely, other researchers put forward differing views. Mahoney (2012) considers that the skills gained on the job and through training might be sufficient for trainees. Dalziel (2010) found in relation to training generally, that many employers are not interested in a whole programme, rather the parts of the programme that contribute to the skill sets needed for the workplace. Over half of

expected credit and programme completion rather than a cohort qualification completion rate. Further information about these measurement metrics can be found at <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Learners-Organisations/Learners/performance-in-tertiary-education/what-the-indicators-mean/Industry-Training-indicators/>

⁵ EPI information for individual ITOs can be found at: <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Learners-Organisations/Learners/performance-in-tertiary-education/Educational-performance-at-individual-tertiary-providers/>

the employers interviewed for a UK study (Trinh, Colahan, Highton and Emmett, 2013) were not concerned about the apprentices' failure to complete as they thought it had little impact on their business.

However, on balance, the research more strongly suggests completing qualifications does make a difference to individual earnings, employment rates and employment stability, and productivity. Therefore, it is important to know more about why people don't complete and the factors contributing to this.

What the literature says

To date considerable work has been undertaken on the factors that contribute to successful qualification completion with less attention being paid to the reasons for non-completion. Much of that work has collected the views of employers, training organisations, and successful completers, with less attention being paid to non-completers. It is a case of the non-completers being more talked 'about' than talked 'to'.

The literature shows single factors on their own do not result in or cause non-completion. Rather it is the interplay of factors that contribute to a trainee making a decision not to continue. Based on the literature, these factors can be categorised as: the employer, the system, and the trainee's personal characteristics, attributes and circumstances (Alkema, 2015).

1. Employer/employment factors include employment relationships, working conditions, workplace culture, the quality of on-job training and employers' attitude to training. Overall the research shows these make the largest contribution to the non-completion of traineeships.
2. System factors include the economic climate (and related directly to this, the labour market), industrial relation systems, and the wage rates paid to trainees. They also include the training and assessment models set down by the various industry training bodies and others responsible for delivering training, for example, Polytechnics in the New Zealand context.
3. Trainee factors are those that impact on trainees' willingness or ability to complete their qualifications. These include age, gender, ethnicity, personal circumstances, prior education level, literacy, numeracy, employability, skill levels, motivation, persistence and attitude.

As such, in the industry training environment, a trainee operates in a world of learning, life and work, where employment, the system and the trainees interact. In some situations, the interaction is complementary and in others the interactions compete.

Research approach

This research set out to gather the views of non-completing trainees themselves about their reasons for and the factors that contribute to the non-completion of their qualifications. The trainees come from 10 ITOs and in 2014 were studying at Levels 3 and 4 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF). As such the research sought to answer the following key questions:

- What factors/reasons contribute to the non-completion of Level 3 and 4 qualifications by apprentices and trainees?
- How are these factors/reasons enacted in practice?

Data were collected from:

- A literature scan conducted from November 2014 to January 2015 to ascertain the key factors that contribute to non-completion. The information from the scan was then used to inform research tools.
- A screening tool questionnaire with 488 trainees conducted from February to March 2015. The purpose of this was to find trainees to participate in qualitative interviews.
- Non-completion data supplied by seven ITOs. These were used as comparative data for the sample to assess the extent to which the sample matched the population of non-completers.
- Structured, qualitative interviews with a sample of 114 non-completing trainees conducted from March to May 2015. The original target was around 150 trainees. The sample selection was based on the proportion of non-completers at level 3 and above in 2014, that came from each of the participating ITOs.

The strength of the approach is the in-depth interviews with non-completers that allowed for exploration of their reasons for non-completion from this particular sample. However, the sample size means the findings cannot be generalised to the population of non-completers, nor to particular ITOs. More detail on the research approach can be found in Appendix A.

Report structure

This report describes and discusses the views of the 114 trainees on their employment, training, reasons for not completing, and how they might have been helped to complete. The report sets out the findings for the trainees as a whole group, using direct quotes to illustrate trainees' experience. The gender, age and ethnicity of the trainee quoted are provided.

Where there are differences in the experiences of the following groups, these are also highlighted throughout the report: younger trainees (15-24 year olds (n=30)); older trainees (40+ year olds (n=40)); Māori trainees (n=22); Level 3 trainees (n=44); Level 4 trainees (n=64); male (n=59) and female trainees (n=55).

The report consists of the following sections:

- Section One describes the trainees' employment and training experiences.
- Section Two outlines why the trainees stopped their training and what would have helped them to continue.
- Section Three discusses the implications of the findings for the key parties and makes recommendations for the future.

Section One: Employment and Training Experiences

Employment and training – section summary:

- 80 percent of trainees were motivated when they started the training; more Māori and level 4 trainees than others felt this way.
- 61 percent of trainees say their employer was positive about training; trainees described their employers as passionate about training, supportive, and helpful.
- Nearly all trainees said they had good work relationships with their boss (89 percent) and workmates (79 percent).
- The third of trainees who didn't feel valued at work faced issues including understaffing, long work hours, complaining co-workers and customers, and poor employment relationships.
- Low pay rates are an issue for some, but getting a pay increase for completing a qualification was not that important to most (78 percent).
- Trainees report less than optimal training environments with 57 percent saying they always have time to practise new skills; 31 percent saying they have separate time for training; and, while 40 percent say someone actively shows them what to do, this can amount to being shown once.
- More older workers were positive about their experiences, although all trainees appreciated opportunities to learn from employers, managers, and more experienced staff. Many younger workers felt they didn't have enough time to learn, or that feedback was not forthcoming on their progress.
- Nearly half the trainees describe training as bookwork. Some undertake this at work but for most it is a solitary activity and a third of trainees find the bookwork difficult to do in their own time.
- Fewer than 20 percent of trainees had someone at their work who gave them on-going, proactive support for their training; around 65 percent of trainees received reactive support in that they could ask for help from their employer or a workmate, get support at block courses or from their ITO, as they needed it; and around 14 percent felt they were 'on their own'.

The trainees and their workplaces

Of the 114 interviewed for this study, 52 percent were male and 48 percent female. They had exited training in 2014. Demographic data from recently (2014) exited trainees from six of the ten ITOs who participated in the study, show 54 percent of all exited trainees were male and 46 percent female. From an ethnicity perspective the sample is also comparable to the population of non-completers from seven of the ITOs in the study.

Māori and Pasifika trainees were over sampled for this research. The Māori trainees have similar gender, age and previous qualification profiles to the sample. Forty-four trainees were working towards level 3 qualifications and 64 working towards level 4 qualifications. Six trainees were not sure what level qualification they were doing. Figures B:1-2 in Appendix B provide further information on age and qualification levels of the sample.

As might be expected in the New Zealand context, the single largest group of trainees in this study (28 percent) were in workplaces with 1-5 staff, with 68 percent in workplaces w fewer than 30 staff.

Eighty-nine percent⁶ of the trainees were working at the time they were interviewed for the study, with 33 percent of them still working in the same place and same job and six percent in the same place but a different job as they had been before starting the qualification.

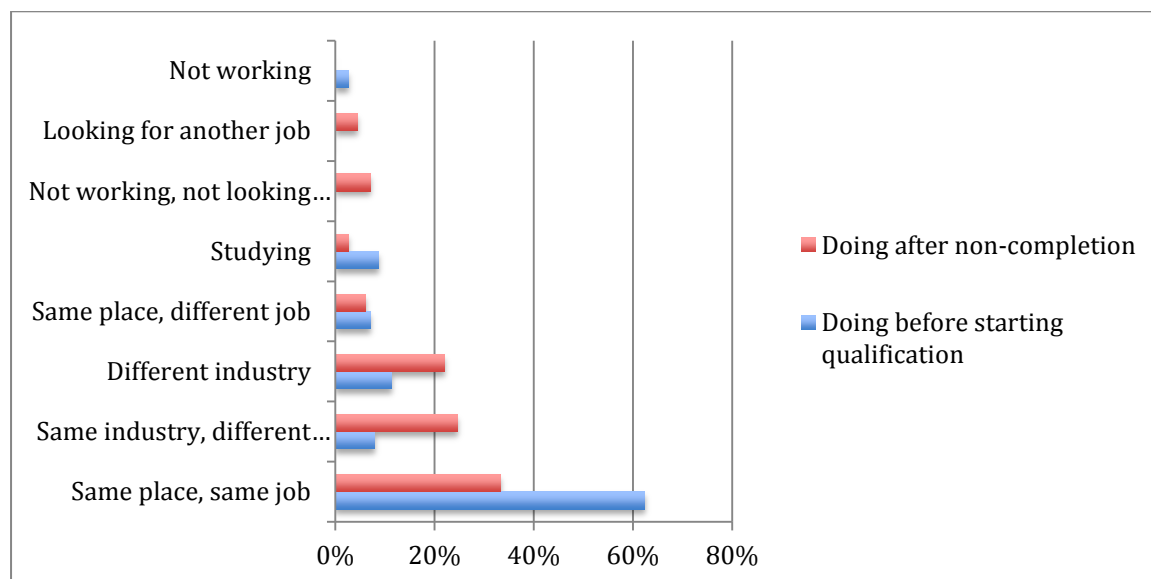


Figure 1: Trainees before starting the qualification and post non-completion

The literature shows completion is important for both employment and employment stability. For example, Bednarz (2014, p34) in Australia reports ‘85 percent of completers as opposed to 60 percent of non-completers were in employment nine months after training’. Similarly, in New Zealand, Crichton (2009) reports 75 percent of those who complete a qualification are with the same employer at the end of their training period, with 50 percent of them still being there a year later. This is compared to 25 percent of non-completers who were still with the same employer a year after their non-completion.

The findings in this study differ, however, from the literature in two ways. Firstly, the majority of the non-completers in this research are in work. Secondly, 39 percent of these trainees are still with the same employer. However, this could be driven by the sample size, the recency of their qualification non-completion, and the industries from which the trainees are drawn.⁷

⁶ Seven percent of the trainees were not in work or looking for work as they were either parents looking after children or had retired.

⁷ In this study more trainees in the healthcare sector than in the other sectors were still in the same workplace. This is also in keeping with the non-completion data from the ITOs that show Careerforce has a larger percentage of trainees who have stopped training and are still with the same employer.

Enrolling in a qualification

Around a third of the trainees said they commenced a qualification within the first three months on the job. A similar proportion of trainees had worked for three to five years in their jobs prior to starting their qualification. This relatively high proportion of the latter may point to employers choosing to train valued and longer-serving employees, rather than the more traditional notion of workplace training as moving a novice through to expert status. Health and disability sector trainees were more likely to have been in their workplace for three to five years before starting training than were other trainees. There was little difference across sectors for those who started within three months of employment with an employer. Trainees said their employers were as likely as they were to initiate enrolment in the qualification.

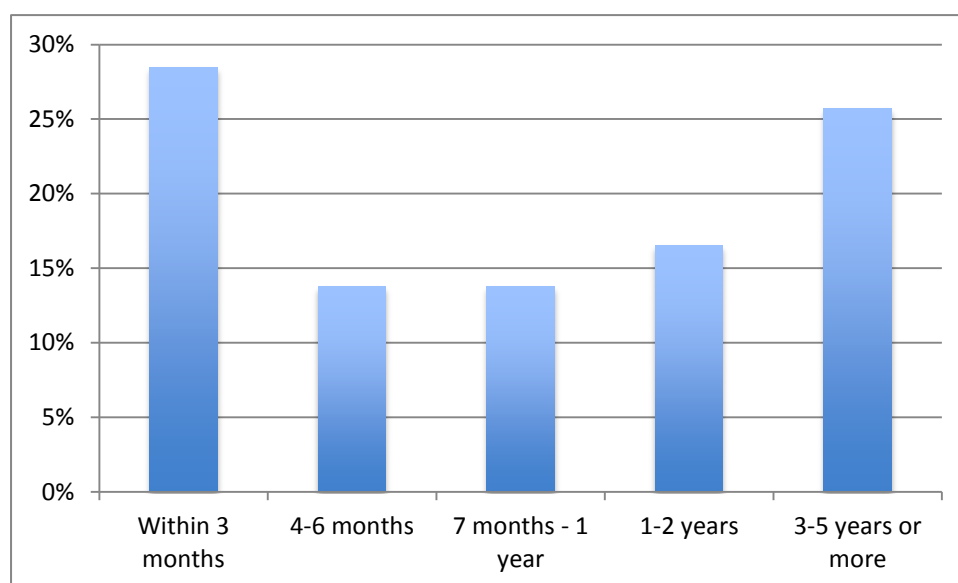


Figure 2: Length of time in the job before starting the qualification (n=109)

Most trainees (70 percent) report the qualification they were enrolled in was not required for either the job they were working in at the time, nor for their employment (64 percent). Where the qualification was a requirement for employment, trainees said this related to either industry regulations, contractual compliance for the employer, or that the employer wanted a qualified workforce.

Trainees said they enrolled to 'get ahead', 'to prepare for their futures' and for 'recognition of the skills they already had'. While both younger and older trainees talked about the importance of training for their futures, older trainees tended to reflect this more in terms of opening up other career opportunities for the later stages of their working lives or that training was related to employer requirements. Younger trainees were more focused on seeing a qualification as a step towards businesses or other opportunities in the future.

- Wanted to get something under my belt, and wanted to go contracting in the future and need certificates to do that. And the boss encouraged it and paid for it. (F, 20-24, Māori)
- To get qualified, to get paid better and get jobs easier. I have a dairy farming background and then the boss suggested the training. (F, 20-24, Pākehā)

- I could have laboured and done what I was doing. I didn't have to do it but it would have allowed me to do extra work on top of that. And it gives you a better understanding. (M, 50+, Pākehā)
- I am a diesel mechanic and got those qualifications in the same organisation. My boss and I decided I should go for the Level 4 Certificate so that I could take on a health and safety role in the company. So it was aimed as a new career move. (M, 40-49, Pākehā)

Motivation to undertake the qualification is clearly a factor that influences a trainee's decision to start and their ability to continue to completion. At the start of their training, 80 percent described themselves as motivated. Those who are very motivated described themselves as, 'keen as', 'really keen, optimistic and motivated', 'excited when I first looked into it'. Those who were motivated described themselves as 'pretty motivated', 'had a good attitude', 'happy to achieve the qual'. More of the Māori and Level 4 trainees, compared to the other trainees, said they were motivated or very motivated.

Twenty percent said they were not motivated to start the training. They said this was because they lacked the time, had other priorities, their circumstances had changed, lack of relevance of the qualification to their work, or that they were made to do it.

- Unmotivated as I didn't really have time. It would've been better if we had allocated time in work hours to do it. A lot of out-of-work time. (F, 20-24, Pākehā)
- Hopeless. Sometimes on Monday I'd almost cry. Didn't want to do it. Did not have a good attitude. Moved to working for myself – can do what I like. Love the job. Want to still get qual. Fully booked 10 weeks in. Feels good when you do it for yourself. If I had been this happy when training, it would have been much better. (M, 20-24, Māori)

Many of the trainees who had a positive attitude at the start lost motivation as the training period went on. The most cited reasons they gave for this included:

- being busy at work, working long hours then too tired to study, and not enough time for study
- lack of support or help, having to do the study in their own time
- finding the book work too difficult
- administrative issues
- personal circumstances
- a sense that the qualification did not mean much or was of little value to them.

Trainees' comments included:

- Motivated at start, but it was hard to stay motivated working all on my own and with very little support. (F, 25-29, Pasifika)
- I was really positive at first and like qualifications behind me – would have liked to do enough to start a nursing degree (because I didn't do high school qualifications) but got frustrated and it became a waste of time. I realised by watching others who got their certificates and who were incompetent, that it didn't really mean anything. (F, 30-34, Pākehā)

- Positive and then so frustrated and quite cynical towards the end because there was no training... It leaves me in limbo. Apparently I'm not enrolled anymore. The [ITO] guy told me I'd been terminated with no discussion with my employer. I don't know if my fees have been paid to [ITO]. I'm on the last paper of the whole thing. I've got no power over it at moment but still able to work. My boss has been ill so I haven't wanted to stress him out, but something needs to happen. I'm in limbo. (M, 40-49, Māori)

Trainees' perspectives on their employers' views on training

On the whole trainees thought their employers were reasonably positive about training and qualifications. Sixty percent of trainees said their employers viewed training and getting a qualification as important. This is further supported by the fact that just over half the employers had initiated the trainee getting started and 64 percent paid for the training.

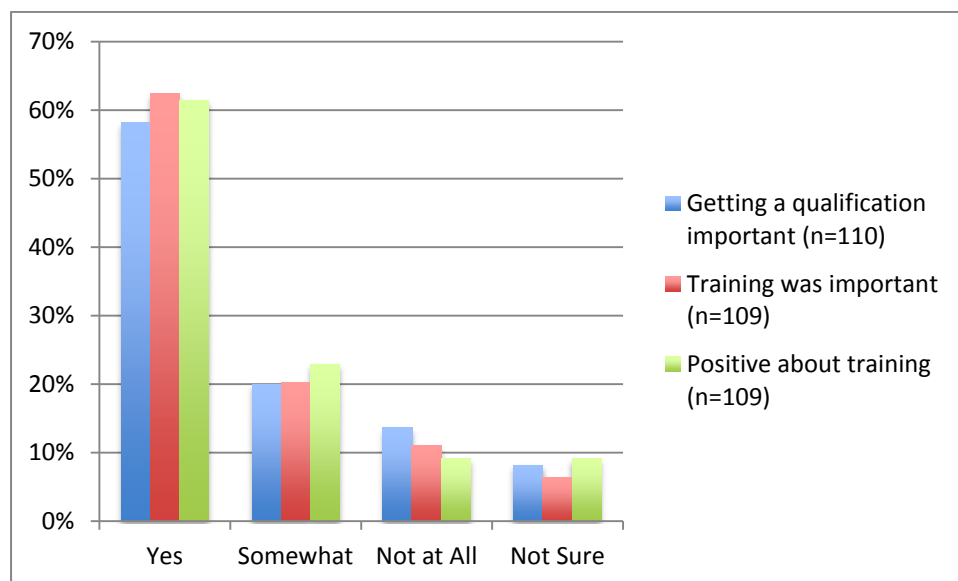


Figure 3: Trainees' perspectives on their employers' views on training

Trainees suggested two broad reasons why they thought employers held positive views – the importance employers placed on skills and, to a certain extent, qualifications, and the need to have qualified staff for contract or regulatory purposes. Those who thought their boss was very positive about qualifications and training described their bosses as being 'supportive' or 'passionate' about training, as being helpful, or as having asked them to start training again.

- He would train us himself sometimes. He'd invite us to look at what he was doing in a special cut when he knew that was what we were studying at the time. Met with us individually every fortnight to ask us how going, good listener and acted on our comments. (F, 20-24, Māori)

Those who didn't think their employers were so positive or were unsure about how positive they were said this was evident in their employers' attitude and general lack of interest in their training.

- One of worst bosses ever had. He was about to inherit the farm and he had to do everything as he wanted to know it would be done right. We called him the baby sitter because he

didn't give us a chance to do anything. Too nervous to ask him to sign off papers. Felt like an inconvenience. (F, 20-24, Māori)

- Not sure because I was just given the books and they took no interest in how I was doing. (F, 20-24, Pasifika)
- More for his own benefit – make him look good. Had three different managers. Most of them were pretty enthusiastic about getting us through. Not sure they really cared. You're just a number. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

Given that more trainees thought their employers were positive about training, the trainees might have expected more support for their training. The fact that so few needed qualifications for the job may mean employers see little impact on their business from trainees' non-completion. This may be particularly true for those still in the same workplace as when they were training.

The literature suggests employers have varied views on qualification completions. Dalziel (2010) points out in relation to training generally, that employers are generally not interested in a whole programme. Gallacher, Whittaker, and Crossan, (2004) found employers in some industries value training more than employers in other industries. For example, they valued it more in construction than in retail. And still others saw non-completion as having little impact on their business (Trinh, Colahan, Higton and Emmett, 2013).

The employment environment

The work environment was reasonable for the trainees with around 35 percent of them saying they got on with their boss 'pretty well' and 54 percent saying 'very well'. That isn't to say things were always easy for trainees as even though the majority report good relationships with their bosses, some suggest the work environment was more or less what they expected and this involved good working times, not so good times and busy work environments.

Trainees similarly reported they got on with workmates, with a majority (79 percent) saying they got on 'pretty well with most of them'. Younger trainees all said they got on well with their workmates (and only one said they didn't get on with their boss).

- Well treated, well trained. Very busy for me, but I work better under pressure. Worried me at first, but I got into it. I prefer to work in a busy salon. (M, 30-35, Pasifika)
- The boss was an arsehole... He had anger issues. Difficult to get along with, including for all others at work as well. (M, 15-19, Pākehā)

Along with getting on well with others at work, around half (47 percent) of trainees said they felt valued at work 'all the time' and 16 percent said 'most of the time'. These valued trainees were also positive about their working conditions. This is attested to by the fact that 20 percent of them described their workplace as busy, with only one trainee finding this stressful. The others said they liked the busy work environment or enjoyed working for safety conscious employers and felt they thrived on it.

- Very busy workshop. Communication with the retail store and relating to work was really good. There were morning talks to sort work then get on with it. (M, 50+, Pākehā)

- Busy – but like fun. Never boring or anything like that. Busy good – not stressful. (F, 20-24, Māori)
- Fantastic – great. Love working here. Busy, productive, safe, good team feel and always looking to improve what they are doing. (F, 20-24, Pākehā)

In contrast to those who felt valued, and enjoyed or managed the stress, those (34 percent) who felt valued at work ‘sometimes’ or ‘not at all’ were more likely to talk about the busy work place as stressful, with nearly half of these talking about their work in this way:

- Understaffed at times. Long hours – often asked to stay on for extra shifts and were under pressure to take them on. Stressful sometimes, although that depended on who my co-workers were. Good crew made it easier – complainers made it harder. (F, 30-34, Pākehā)
- Busy, stressful, long hours. Hated the stress – mostly why I left. Work 12 hours a day and go home feeling like I’d worked 24. Getting abuse from people on the other side of the counter really doesn't help. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

There were also a small group of trainees who clearly experienced both unsupportive and poor employment relationships:

- I was just given the books and they took no interest in how I was doing. (F, 20-24, Pasifika)
- The new farm manager failed to supply any farm info that is required for me to complete the level 4 assessment, so I failed to complete. (F, 35-39, Asian)

Overall, busy workplaces were a common theme with around 40 percent of the trainees making comments about this. That said, the trainees accepted the workplace was not going to be a perfect environment and provide them with a sense of value all of the time. Staff changes as well as new management or changes in management direction regularly impacted on the dynamics of the workplace. Many talked of the importance of coping when things were going well, and when they didn’t.

As with the employment and employment stability findings, the findings here related to employment differ to the findings in the literature. Employment and workplace culture-related factors have been identified in the international literature as making the largest contribution to non-completion of apprenticeship qualifications (Snell & Hart, 2008; Fillietaz, 2011; Bednarz 2014). While these are not shown to be an issue for all the trainees in this study, there are employment-related elements such as work stress and long hours that contribute to the evidence about the burden on industry trainees who both work and study.

Pay rates

What trainees are paid during training will be influenced by the employer, by standard industry pay rates, and by minimum pay entitlements, such as minimum and training wage rates. Just under half the trainees (44 percent) said they would get an increase in pay if they completed their qualifications, 36 percent said they wouldn’t and 19 percent did not know.

As might be expected, the trainees had varying views about the pay rates they were receiving while they were training – from those who thought they were well paid through to those who thought

their pay was ‘rubbish’ . Of the 85 who gave a view about their pay while they were training, just under a quarter of them thought they were paid well, variously describing it as, ‘good’; ‘pays well for an apprentice’; and ‘bloody excellent actually. It was real good’. Over a third of these suggested their pay was okay, what they might expect for the job, but this is not to say that they didn’t always want more. The remaining 39 percent who thought their pay was poor said this was the case because they were not paid well for the job they did, that the pay rate was unfair, it was not enough to support a family on, or that they had not had a pay increase in a few years.

- The pay was shit, \$15 per hour but \$75 per week to pay for my apprenticeship. I had wages docked to pay for an electrical fault in the work vehicle that I was not responsible for... [legal action is now pending]. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

A larger proportion of Māori trainees, compared to other trainees, said their pay was poor. And just over half of those who described their pay as being low came from three sectors: hospitality, health care and hairdressing. The younger trainees were more comfortable with the pay they were receiving while training than the older trainees.

- Unhappy that it [pay] was not much, and so not that keen to do training which took extra time and wasn't that useful for me personally. (M, 20-24, Māori)

Getting a pay increase was not important for most of the trainees (78 percent). They said this was the case either because money wasn’t a driving factor for them or that they didn’t want the stress of a higher paying job. Nearly all of those who thought a pay increase was important (22 percent) were also expecting to receive an increase. They saw the increase as reflecting their value, their chance to go on to a higher-level job or meant they were a bit better off.

- Offered more money if I did [complete]. But money’s not really important to me. It’s about making sure the clients are happy – and feel good. It makes me feel good. (M, 30-35, Pasifika)

This is consistent with the New Zealand findings on pay (Chan, 2011; McDonald, Alkema & Blakie, 2011), which showed that while pay rates might be seen as poor, pay was not a driving factor for trainees. In addition, many of the trainees had been working in the same job for some time and their training did not affect their pay, suggesting there is no financial, extrinsic incentive.

The trainees’ views on pay differ to the views of trainees internationally. An international comparison of pay rates shows, in countries where training wages are low and qualified rates are much higher, this may act as an incentive to complete qualifications (Low Pay Commission, 2013). In New Zealand however, where apprentices have higher training wage rates (Crichton, 2009), pay increases are unlikely to be substantially more than the rates being paid while training, and thus provide a lower rate of return and less incentive to complete qualifications.

On the whole trainees talked about their workplaces, work colleagues, work conditions and work environment in positive terms and clearly enjoyed their work. They coped with the ups and downs of their jobs and the busy work environment regardless of whether they were starting out at work and

looking to progress, or were further on in their working lives, eager for recognition of their skills and experience.

Trainees and their learning experience

Into the experience of busy working lives, industry trainees need to incorporate learning and assessment for qualifications. Workplaces are primarily sites of production or service delivery and as such this has implications for how trainees are expected to learn on the job, how much time employers have to teach and support them, and the extent to which employers have the capability to do this.

Learning on the job – ‘being shown’, ‘doing’ and ‘time to practise’

The majority of trainees (85 percent) say that learning happens ‘on the job’. This is a positive result, but there were significantly fewer trainees (57 percent) who said they were always given time to practise new skills and only 31 percent who had separate time for training. A greater proportion of Māori trainees, than others, identified they had separate time for training at work and time to practise at work. Nearly three-quarters of the trainees said they found the training at work either ‘quite easy’ or ‘very easy’, although Māori trainees were a little less likely than other trainees to say it was easy.

The ‘learning on the job’ described by some trainees is often more about learning by doing on their own, rather than learning by being shown by an expert.

- Time to just do the job – learnt as I did it. Just info at handover. Read notes, found out what I was doing. Had my own lists and just got on with it. We repeat lots of stuff so that's how we practise. (F, 50+ Māori)

Around 40 percent of the trainees made comments about being actively shown what to do in the workplace. This ‘showing’ happened in varying degrees, from ongoing coaching and support through to being shown once with the expectation that tasks would be able to be completed by trainees, through to trainees asking how to do things as they needed to know. And not surprisingly, even though the trainees were shown, there was still some expectation they would take responsibility for their own learning. Many were comfortable with this approach.

- Work is like work, there is nothing training about it. Showed how to use the machine – did a good job showing us and we just got on with it. Filled in folders as we went. (M, 35-39, Pasifika)
- Done as things popped up. I had never driven a tractor, so when I needed to they taught me. They found ways to help you practise and they would check on me to see how it was going. (M, 35-39, Pākehā)
- Most of it I just learned in the course of doing my work – I'm good at asking for help about stuff I don't know and I have lots of mates that I can ask at young farmers or in the training courses. I could also ask my boss if I needed to. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)
- Chefs showed me – would do stuff [with me]. A couple of them were really good at teaching me. In the bulk kitchen – one taught me as if in an actual restaurant. Pretty good – don't think it could have been done better. (F, 20-24, Māori)

More of the older trainees were positive about their experience of being shown to do things on the job than their younger counterparts. This may well reflect their greater likelihood of having been in the job for longer periods of time than the younger trainees and thus being more experienced.

Younger trainees also talked about positive training experiences that had worked for them, including having the opportunity to learn from employers, managers, and senior staff.

- Getting training every day from the boss. He taught me everything he knows. He was hard on me, but it was worthwhile. Every word was about farming, how to do things better... I now pass it on, now that I'm a boss. Taken his teaching and people skills to make my staff happy. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

There were also trainees who, while appreciative of the training, felt the expectations of their employer to be doing better.

- They started me on easy stuff and once I got more skilled I got on to harder stuff. Ninety percent of the time I was shown – the other – had to figure it out myself. All right until I got yelled at. They did the training well. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)

Younger trainees also commented that they felt they were given insufficient time to grasp the new knowledge and skills, or were given insufficient explanations about why things had to be done in a certain way.

- Shown how to do stuff, general jobs we did all the time then did stuff on my own. They'd talk me through it. Lots of watching – then he just expected me to do it. I couldn't always and he'd get grumpy. (M, 15-19, Pākehā)
- No one [trained me]. Not enough time. They are there to make money and don't have time. It would've been better if I'd attended courses – but got told we were too busy to send us – and they still have to pay you. Talked to other apprentices who went to four or five [courses] a year. I went to one in two years. Should be time allowed at work, even half a day a week or a minimum number of courses. Make this mandatory – get agreement from both parties: employer and apprentice. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

Very few trainees talked about receiving feedback on what they were doing. The lack of feedback caused the trainees to either lose interest or conclude there was little interest from the employer or ITO. Trainees talked more often about being 'told' how to do things than they did about feedback. This 'telling' related both to being told what to do at work, and to being told about the training.

- Learning from your workmates is part of the job, so not really separate at all. We were just given the book, told to read it and do it, but never shown how to go about doing it and I'm a person that needs to be shown, so that's why I didn't do it. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)

The trainees appreciate someone taking the time to show them what to do (more than once), giving them opportunities to practise and to ask for further help should they require it. However, many trainees relied on asking for help, rather than training being structured or planned.

- Most of it I just learned in the course of doing my work – I’m good at asking for help about stuff I don’t know and have lots of mates I can ask at young farmers or in the training courses. I could also ask my boss if I needed to. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)

The literature on workplace learning emphasises the importance of having opportunities to learn from experts and to practise what they learn on the job (Chan, 2011; Vaughan, O’Neil and Cameron, 2011; Alkema and McDonald, 2014a). The findings in this study suggest the learning environment for many trainees is less than optimal.

Training as ‘bookwork’

The key concern overall, for training, is that nearly half the trainees saw training as equalling the bookwork. As such, this involved them working through their books and completing assignments on their own in the workplace or in their own time. Around a third of them said they found doing the ‘bookwork in their own time’ difficult. Their reasons for this included:

- finding the time
- finding some of the questions difficult (it was not clear from these responses whether this was a literacy issue)
- having difficulties with reading, writing or maths
- having commitments outside of work
- struggling when working on their own
- personal motivation.

What is essentially a self-directed learning approach was a major contributing factor to their declining motivation to continue with the qualification.

- I was very positive, but enthusiasm was marginal as I went on. And when I found out training meant reading a book I didn't care ... and with no feedback lost interest all together. Would go back to training if another employer was interested. (M, 35-39, Pākehā)
- There was no time during work hours. It all had to be done in our own time, among the job and family as well. There was a lot of bookwork to do in our own time. My assistant did it too and she graduated last year. My daughter also started but didn't finish. We would all ask each other if we were stuck with a question. It would be nice if all three of us got together, if we had time, to sort it out and all know where we are. But we never had that time. The area manager of the franchise came out only once or twice. Pretty much they threw us to the lions in the cage. That's how we felt at the time. It was really hard because we were all struggling, especially when you have a family as well. (F, 40-49, Pasifika)

Younger trainees were less likely to give the description of training as bookwork, compared to the older trainees. But the fifty percent of younger trainees who found it difficult to find the time to do their bookwork, also had difficulty with the bookwork itself.

- At work it's just second nature to you. The theory, I had to resubmit some papers. It's getting the wording and answering the papers right to complete it. But once they show you how it was, all good. Feedback was useful, tutors were good. (M, 15-19, Māori)

- Paper side was sometimes hard to understand. A 100-page book to read is daunting. Took hours of my own time, and trying to get motivated to do it every weekend when others are out having fun. Hard to discipline myself. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

The main theme from the older trainees was of a lack of support for their learning and the subsequent negative experience that occurred as a result for them. However, these older trainees were more likely to discuss ways in which they managed their bookwork.

- Because I like to talk to people, need visual, a tutor. Reading and absorbing takes a long time. Material was a bit overwhelming. Took it to work, thought I'd get some time to look at it, but haven't. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)
- I was coordinating the training sessions and we talked together to complete our book work, working in groups to help each other and share ideas and discuss. (M, 50+, Māori)
- I found it quite hard because I'm dyslexic, so any sort of exam I find difficult. There was some support. My fellow work people and the ITO knew. I don't hide it. I would ask the tutor or fellow students, 'How do you spell this?' It was not really a problem. (M, 50+, Pākehā)

There were examples of structured learning time for bookwork in workplaces, although this was not common.

- When we had time we would have a one-hour session with trainers going through the info in the booklet. That happened about four times in that two months. It was very informative, they were good at teaching and presented information in ways we could all understand, and no questions were stupid, so we could really pick their brains. We were learning on paper and reflecting on what we already do at work, so it was not a case of us being shown anything new during work. (F, 25-29, Pasifika)

The combination of finding the time and understanding the requirements for the qualification was too much for many of the trainees. While this self-directed learning approach has been shown to be problematic for Māori trainees (Kerehoma et al., 2013), and for Māori and Pasifika trainees (Competenz, 2014), this study showed it was problematic for trainees regardless of their ethnicity.

Alkema and McDonald (2014a) talk about workplaces needing to plan, and having knowledge about learning and assessment, structured approaches to supervision, support and mentoring, and cultural understanding. Vaughan et al.'s (2011) principles for effective workplace learning include the need for training to be organised, relevant learning materials, structured learning activities, opportunities to practise, and feedback. While trainees in this study may not be aware of the presence of, or be able to describe all of these components, they were able to talk about their training experience and how they felt about it. For many their training/learning at work was definitely not what could be described as an effective learning experience and this became a contributing factor to their non-completion.

Trainees experience of ITOs and block courses

In the industry training context, support for trainees at work can also come from ITO staff, training materials, and block courses. In terms of their ITOs, trainees' experience is reasonably positive. Chan

(2011) reflects this, noting trainees found visits from ITO staff helped in reminding employers of their responsibilities for ensuring appropriate workplace learning.

The extent to which trainees saw ITO advisers varied.

Fewer than half the trainees (41 percent) said they saw someone from the ITO on a regular basis or every few months, and even then some of these trainees made comments that suggested they weren't entirely sure whether the person they were seeing was from the ITO, or whether they were assessors or tutors.

- Not the ITO, but there was a guy who came every six months or so but I can't remember his name – he was supposed to try and facilitate the training and push it along. Trouble is he had no power and wasn't able to help me much. If there was some way to penalise employers financially for when they don't help apprentices to progress, that might help. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)

Fifteen percent of trainees said they had irregular contact with the ITO, but 44 percent said they either only saw someone when they signed up, or they had never seen anyone, or they did not know who the ITO was. Visits were often associated with assessments. Those who had irregular contact talked about inconsistency of contact with some of them saying they would have liked more contact.

- Once or twice a year at most, when we go in to meetings in [X]. That was definitely useful. We can't do it more often because we are very rural so [ITO] can't always come up. It was fine. I have heavy workload anyway, so it's fine. (M, 50+, Māori)

Those who rarely or never saw someone from the ITO seldom made comments about this. A few commented they were supported in their workplaces, through providers or 'others'.

- Very rarely. I'm sure I was supposed to see them more than I did. Not sure if that's my fault or theirs, a bit of both maybe. It would have helped actually, staying in touch more gives you more confidence and a bit more support. I need a lot of encouragement. (F, 30-34, Pākehā).

The comments from trainees indicate they are confused about the range of people within the training system who might assist them and who they should talk with about any concerns. While not all ITOs deliver a model of training arrangements that sees them come in contact with trainees on a regular basis, they can provide trainees with information about the system so trainees are more aware of who they are seeing and the roles and responsibilities that each player in the system has.

Most ITOs also provide resource materials that aim to help trainees with their learning and assessment. Just over half, 55 percent of trainees, found the ITO provided materials 'relevant' to their workplace and 22 percent said they were 'sometimes relevant'. There was no pattern across ITOs for those who found the materials relevant or otherwise.

- Booklets to read over and assessment book. Materials were okay. Most [it's] just hard to understand what they are asking us to do to pass. Lots struggle with that. Questions didn't seem to correlate with what we were learning. (F, 20-24, Pākehā)

- Need them for on-job assessments so you could work through it. Took bits and pieces and used them on the job. Pretty relevant. Some paper work not so relevant – you can't use it all. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

Those (16 percent) who said the materials were 'not relevant' mainly said this was the case as they either did not contain the material they needed for the job, or there was information they did not require.

- What we did was very specific – but the books didn't have a lot about specifically what we were doing, so I was learning a lot more than was covered in the course. The course was mainly focused on corrugated iron and tiles. In comparison we were using a wider range of materials and also doing commercial work – so doing very large roofs. (M, 30-34, Pākehā)
- Complicated to work through. Not in order – all over the place. Section on race relations, immigration, employment tribunal – we're childcare, look after kids. We don't need all that lawyer stuff. Only thing we needed would have been related to work contracts. Some questions had nothing to do with looking after kids. (F, 50+, Pākehā)
- Most [questions] had nothing to do with what we do. And some of the questions are pretty much the same, so you run out of answers. I would try to fill up all the space and then we were told one or two words were all you need. We sent the book away, and they called us and said it was not right – but at the start they had said there was no right or wrong answer. [ITO] did not explain things properly. They came on site once and then we finally understood but they did not explain at the beginning. It was really hard for me and my colleague who is Chinese. Sometimes you think in your own language. (F, 40-49, Pasifika)

Fewer than half the trainees (40 percent) attended block courses⁸ and these were a mixed experience for them. While some found tutors helpful, enjoyed the interactive experience and found the content was relevant to the paper work they needed to do, many others felt either unprepared for the learning on block courses and found the course content was not relevant to the work they were doing. However, all the Māori trainees who attended block courses found the materials relevant to their work.

⁸ Block courses meant different things to the trainees. For some it meant going regularly to a tertiary education provider and completing workbooks or getting some tuition at night classes; for others it was an occasional study day organised through or at their work; and for others it was what is traditionally called a block course where trainees from a number of workplaces gathered together.

Support during training

Trainees confront a number of difficulties and issues on a daily basis when learning in and for work. The lack of deliberate and planned acts of training is compounded by a lack of support for learning. Figure 4 below shows the type of support trainees said they received during their training.

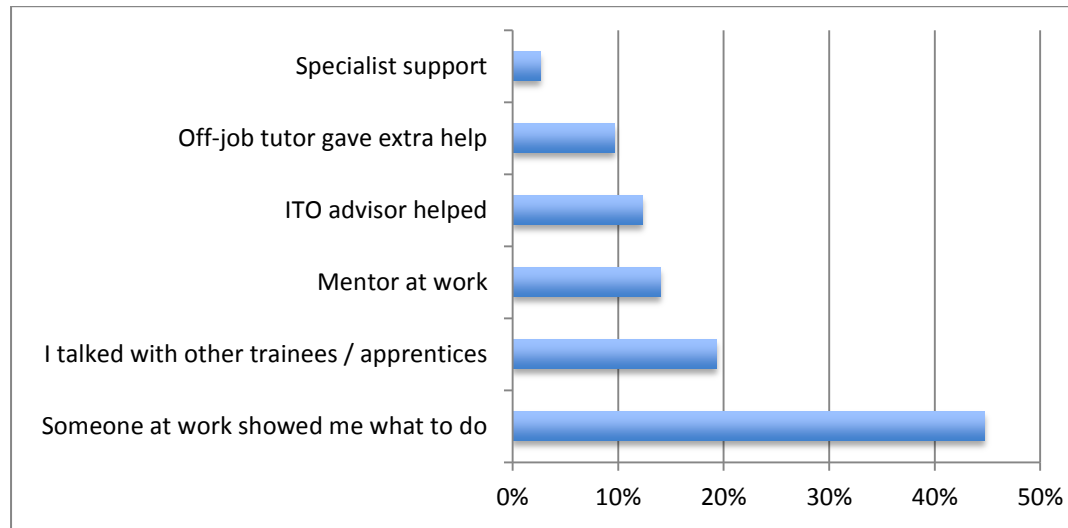


Figure 4: Support during training (N=114)

Many trainees found support at work for training tended to be unstructured and at the trainees' initiative. The quality of the support they received is also less than optimal, particularly in terms of what trainees said they expected and needed.

- A little bit was done on the job – mostly the work is just common sense and you are just told to do a job. I came from town and muddled my way through. I got verbal help by asking, usually by phone. Occasionally my boss would show me things and if I needed to get some experience they would provide it. (F, 35-39, Pākehā)
- I felt like I had no support at all – I like to learn new things and I honestly tried, but not having anyone to ask for help or to talk about things with was difficult especially as this was my first time in a job after having been on a benefit. (F, 20-24, Pasifika)
- Always people to talk to, specially at smokos'. Workshop foreman, could talk to him, but tricky to find the time to talk. They have to do their own job. They're not paid to help you. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)
- If I get difficulties I approached my manager and he was supportive. Sometimes my colleagues as well. Most of time I am doing it by myself. (F, 50+, Asian)
- No one showed me. I worked by self. Had to read books and could ask if didn't get answers. The process was all right – made me more independent. I had people, friends and could ask anytime. (M, 20-24, Other)

Overall, just under a quarter of the trainees said they got a chance to talk with other trainees at work. Talking with other trainees is an important aspect of any learning, but there were limited opportunities for trainees to do this. Those who didn't get the opportunity either had no other trainees at their workplace, or the work place was too small, or no-one else was doing the same qualification. Older trainees also said this occurred because they were too busy, connections weren't

made in the organisation or that they worked in individual environments. Where the opportunity was available, for example in larger companies, this was a missed chance for further support as the research shows peer support, be it from other trainees or workmates, is also an important factor in encouraging trainees to continue with their qualifications (Chan, 2011; Ryan, Lomax, and Brooking, 2011; Alkema & McDonald, 2014b).

- Training was relevant, but just difficult to do because of the way it was organised. Needed some time made to be together with others that were studying. In this organisation, I didn't know who else was studying and so didn't have any chance to talk through and share information. (F, 50+ Pasifika)
- There were other guys at work I could ring if I was on a site by myself, but not from the ITO. The ITO was kind of loose. Even if you try to explain problems there was not much understanding. (M, 50+, Pākehā)
- Reading the books, and someone who had level 4 read my material and gave me advice. That was the best. Support at work from a work mate – the learning rep was the one that helped me do it. Helped highlight important stuff. She was great. (F, 50+ Māori)
- At our centre we got together as a group over the weekends. As a company – nothing. (F, 50+, Pākehā)

Nearly all the Māori trainees talked positively about the support they received with half of them saying they had someone at work who showed them what to do, and nearly a third of those who had a mentor at work were Māori trainees. While Kerehoma, Connor, Garrow and Young (2013) found Māori trainees tended to be more reluctant to ask for help, only a small number of Māori trainees (3) reported any barriers to accessing the help they required at work.

- Another girl quite a bit ahead of me – she would talk to me. The boss was really good. Showed me what he does if there is a health and safety incident – and what he had to do afterwards. Then I started doing the filing of the health and safety stuff, so it was easy to understand when I went to the course. (F, 20-24, Māori)
- Other apprentices were at different stages so could talk about stuff at different levels. [Polytech] person was exceptional – really cared and passionate. Others at work were really good. (F, 20-24, Māori)
- I was co-ordinating the training sessions and we talked together to complete our book work, working in groups to help each other and share ideas and discuss. (M, 50+, Māori)

Those who attended block courses had more opportunities for support with around 70 percent of these trainees saying they did talk to others.

- Really learned a lot from other trainees at our fortnightly classes and enjoyed being part of a discussion group. (F, 35-39, Pākehā)
- There were three groups doing the block courses at the same time, so lots of opportunities to interact and socialise. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)

Most of the trainees (94 percent) chose to make further comments about the type of support they had and these fall into three categories:

1. Optimal support (20 percent)

Those who felt they had employers or others at their work who were prepared to show them what to do on an ongoing basis.

- One of the guys in my crew was really good at helping us with skills and he was really experienced. He was great at explaining technique and regulations and checking our work. We would sometimes also get together on a Saturday morning to go over new stuff that needed more than we could easily cover on the job. (M, 30-34, Pākehā)

2. Medium support (65 percent)

Those who could ask for help from their employers, or who could talk to their workmates, or got support at block courses or from the ITO on a needs basis.

- Not much unless I really went out of my way to ask. Mostly I was self-taught. The classes were really good. We had an ex dairy farmer who taught us and he was great. You do need a lot of drive to get what you need. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)

3. No Support (14 percent)

Those who felt they were on their own.

- Got nothing – because of the way I did it, and not from [the ITO] either. Not sure how [the ITO] works with the employer. Need to have more guidelines and the employer needs to know more about the course work, where to find answers etc. (F, 35-39, Pākehā)
- I wouldn't mind trying again, but want it to be more organised and not be left to my own devices. Need more guidance. I'm keen to give it another go. (F, 20-24, Pasifika)

Many of those in the medium support category acknowledged there was support for them. It seemed, however, that it was very much up to the trainee to both identify their need and request support. As such, it required the trainees to understand what they needed, be proactive and have the confidence to ask for help. It also required them to be persistent, determined and motivated.

Poor quality training or lack of training in workplaces is cited in several pieces of research as a reason for non-completion. Snell and Hart (2008) found that 60 percent of non-completers reported taking part in training they thought was only appropriate for new apprentices and 19 percent reported having no training at all. In Chan's (2011) study, 11 of the 34 non-completers cited insufficient training as their reason for not completing and the Learning and Skills Council (2009) reported the lack of training and/or lack of relevant quality training was a factor related to non-completion. In this study, the lack of training and support for training in the workplace certainly contributed to non-completion.

Section Two: Discontinuing training and what can be done

Discontinuing training and what can be done – section summary:

- The majority of trainees (71 percent) gave a single reason for stopping training.
- Personal and/or family circumstances contributed to around a third of trainees stopping their training (including health, relationship issues, bereavements, family demands) and a third of these thought something could have been done to keep them in training.
- Lack of support for training was a reason given by 20 percent of trainees.
- Seventeen percent of trainees made personal decisions (including moving towns, trying something new or changing jobs) that were seemingly unrelated to their training experience.
- 60 percent said they needed more help from their employers and 30 percent said ITOs and off-job providers could do more.
- Training-related support at work would have helped more than a third of trainees. This included time at work for training and bookwork, employers who show an interest in training and someone who could train them.
- Bookwork is a primary area of difficulty for trainees – both finding the time and accessing help with the content.
- 40 percent expressed regret at having given up their training, while a similar proportion seemed more relieved to have stopped, as training had become a burden.

A cumulative impact

While workplace relationships, workplace culture and the working environment were reasonable, the overall cumulative impact of a less-than-optimal training experience, working long hours, lack of general support, and having to do bookwork in their own time contributed to the trainees' decisions to withdraw from their qualifications. To help determine the key reasons, the trainees were asked to give up to three reasons for not completing. This section sets out a description of these reasons and how they play out at the employer, system and personal levels.

Trainees gave a range of reasons for not continuing with around thirty percent of them giving more than one reason. Often the reasons given were straightforward: personal decisions such as not being motivated enough to continue or wanting to try something else; system reasons such as feedback or lack of it on assessments; or employment reasons such as being too busy at work or not getting the right sort of training at work. Where trainees made personal decisions to discontinue their training, they were in control of the decision-making process. In other words, they made an active choice to leave, rather than having circumstances happen to them as is the case with those who cite personal circumstances or family commitments.

However, as has already been discussed, industry training happens within a work environment and for many trainees this happens on top of work. Therefore, the reasons are not all straightforward; they overlap and impact each other. This can be seen most clearly with the reason categories of personal circumstances and family commitments.

Personal and family circumstances – a common tipping point

Around a third of the trainees (44), with an even split across male and female trainees, cited personal or family circumstances as a reason for non-completion, with 16 trainees giving these as their sole reason. These personal/family reasons include health – general health, injuries, mental health, pregnancy, health of family members. They also include a range of everyday matters including family bereavements, relationship break-ups, family demands, changing jobs, and financial pressures. In other words, these people were facing issues that combined to impact on their ability to undertake study in their own time. Personal circumstances impacted on younger and older trainees equally, but more of the older trainees, than the younger ones, cited family circumstances as one of their main reasons for not completing.

- Went through depression which I still have. I lost all thought about trying to complete. Generally struggling. But have to keep working to pay the bills. (F, 50+ Pākehā)
- I lost my Mum in the same year and my brother the year before and then my sister was unwell. At the start I focused on my assignments but in the end my family came first. With my manager and the franchise, we decided to put it aside. And when you leave it's hard to pick up again. When I went to the graduation I spoke to [ITO] about continuing but now I have that additional job so I won't have time. At end of day I have had it. Working just afternoons (18 hours per week) is not enough to support a family. (F, 40-49, Pasifika)
- A lot of coaching and after school activities built up through the year. Also I have younger kids so I'm not keen to do study all the time. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)
- Dad's overseas and I'm the man of the house so have to support the family. Had to work extra jobs. Work at [X] and part-time labouring job. [Primary job] 8-4.30; 5.30 to 10.30 at [X] and at the weekend another labouring job... Had some time to study, but too tired to concentrate... But have moved house now and the rent is down. Have cut down hours at [X]. Have talked to [ITO] and asked to start again. The boss is keen for this too. (M, 20-24, Other)

Others describe the personal or family circumstances as the tipping point for non-completion. Here this often coincided with a less than optimal training experience.

- The day I walked out I found out a good friend had passed away. I'd been sitting in a room by myself for a couple of days working [through the ITO bookwork]. I couldn't cope. I told the tutor and boss I was not coming back. It was doing my head in. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)

What this 'life' information shows, is that something has to give. And in the case of the 36 trainees who cited personal or family reasons, it was the study. However, a third of these trainees felt something could have been done to support them through to completion. This included follow-up, support with bookwork and/or more time at work for bookwork, being able to put the training on hold, and a higher pay rate.

- Follow-up from the ITO to see how I was doing, whether I needed some help might have sparked it back into life. Talking now means I'll go back and look at it... No one else was paying any attention. Would have got my money back if I completed in a certain time, but that time was up by the time I got the books. Too much else going on to follow up myself. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)

- If I actually had someone who wanted me to learn as much as I wanted to learn – it would have been easier. If I could have had the continuity over the time of the operation. It would have been good to have had more of a mentor or if I worked on a farm that I didn't have to fight to learn on. (F, 35-39, Pākehā)

Changing personal circumstances are also cited in the literature as a reason for non-completion. Trinh et al. (2013) found it to be the most common reasons cited by employers in the UK. Jeffcoat and Jeffcoat (2006) and LCS (2009) found personal or family matters get in the way and that apprentices rank these more highly than their apprenticeships.

Individual decisions

The next largest group of trainees (29 per cent) are those who, for a range of reasons, took themselves out of the training environment. These trainees made decisions that impacted on their ability to complete their qualifications including not liking the work, wanting to try something else/changing jobs, moving towns, and not being motivated. For 22 of them, this decision was their sole reason for not continuing.

- I was unhappy in my last workplace, lost motivation and had a rough patch in my personal life and couldn't focus on it... I think it was all me. [I needed] a bit more leniency on training evidence, but mostly it was just me. I didn't like the environment I was in. (F, 20-24, Māori)
- It was not applicable to me. I already had all the knowledge and being asked to write it down was demoralising. It undervalued what I knew. (F, 20-24, Pākehā)
- I applied for another job which was better pay, better hours, closer to home (F, 20-24, Pākehā)

Lack of support for training

Lack of support was the next most cited reason given by around 20 per cent of the trainees, with 13 of them giving this as their sole reason (over half). A greater percentage of older trainees gave this as a reason compared to younger trainees. Twelve trainees thought the support should have come from work.

- More support at work and from a one day a month session; more time in work hours; a chance to meet with other trainees. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)
- Having some other person that I could have worked with – sometimes I need help. I asked and nothing was ever done. (F, 20-24, Pasifika)

Eleven thought it could have come from the ITO or training providers in some way.

- If people turn up to help me with homework and to show me more baking and business skills. Haven't done any of the homework as I need help. (F, 35-39, Asian)
- If the tutor had buckled down and made people do the work, had some authority. He let everyone get away with everything. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)

The importance of support is also confirmed in the literature. Snell and Hart (2008) concluded that, overall, apprentices and trainees require strong support if they are to complete training. Gallacher et

al. (2004, p.25) noted that where employers did not 'give support, encouragement and time to young people' they were more likely to leave.

In the New Zealand context, Sligo et al. (2010) found Modern Apprentices with low literacy skills needed support from employers, Modern Apprenticeship Co-ordinators and literacy tutors in order to help their completion. Support, including mentoring, coaching, pastoral care and visual learning material, for Māori and Pasifika trainees makes an important contribution to their success. (Competenz, 2014; Kerehoma et al., 2013; Kopu, 2010).

For some it was the lack of support that tipped the balance, but again this wasn't always straightforward. An example of this complexity is found with the trainee who said he needed help to finish the physics part of his course. This trainee also found studying at night difficult because of his family commitments, but was prepared to set aside the time to complete the qualification. He also had health issues.

- In the end the ITO said if you don't do this exam we can't carry on with you. In hindsight I should have got my boss, my doctor, the ITO in a room to talk together. But I didn't and couldn't finish and couldn't do the work and the ITO were coming at me from all directions and not talking with me. I took too long to sign things off but I can't really blame the employer because they were trying to keep their head above water and have to take the jobs they can get. I may not be able to go back to 40 hours a week. (M, 50+, Pākehā)

Other reasons for non-completion

Smaller numbers of trainees cited reasons such as 'not getting on with people at work' (seven percent). This finding differs to that of Snell and Hart (2008) who found almost half of the 39 non-completing apprentices from south eastern Australia said they had problems with the workplace and included in these problems is not getting on with the boss and bullying.

The small number (5) who gave low pay rates as their main reason is however in keeping with other Australian and New Zealand research. Bednarz (2014) reports that only nine percent of trade apprentices in 2008 and five percent in 2009 reported low pay as their main reason for leaving. Only one of the 34 non-completers in Chan's (2011) study cited low wages as a reason for non-completion.

Seven trainees cited the ITO as the sole reason for non-completion. These included not seeing an assessor, materials not being fit for purpose, assignments not marked, and courses not being run at a suitable time. Only six trainees cited employer/employment issues as their sole reason. This included an employer holding back results and then leaving the company, high workloads and no incentive to train, and employers withdrawing trainees.

Improving the industry training experience

The trainees talked about a number of things that would have improved their experience of industry training. Figure 5 below shows these responses. The only difference observed across the trainees was that more Level 4 trainees than Level 3 trainees said: 'better training resources' and 'someone

at work who knew more about how to train me’. Those who said the latter came from across the ITOs and were either in traditional apprenticeships or management training.

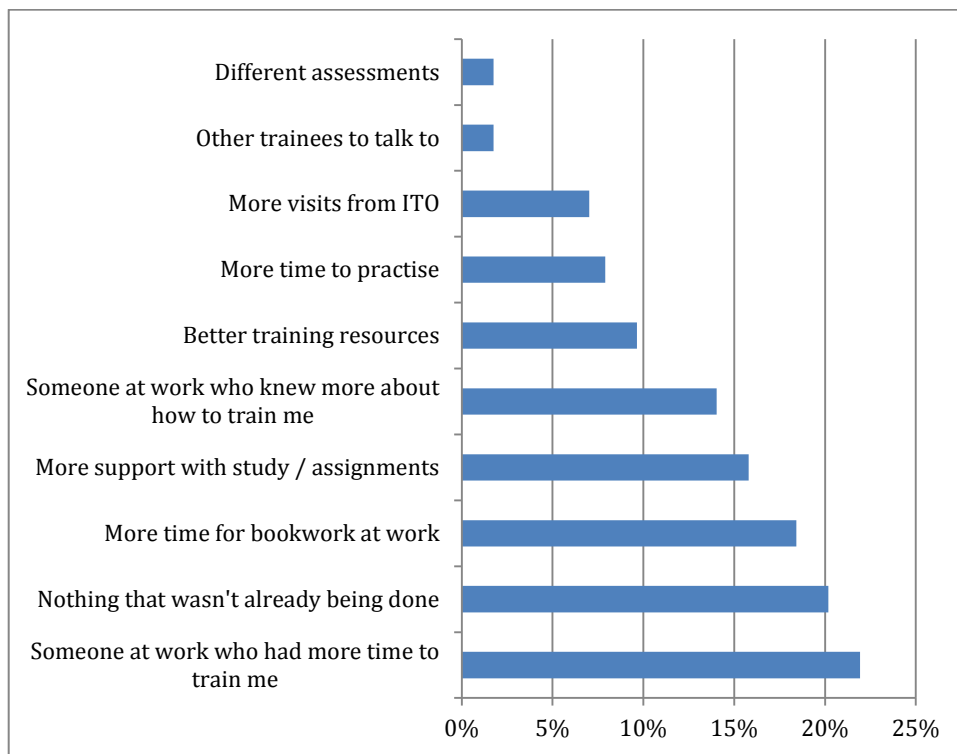


Figure 5: What would have helped improve the training (N=135)

In total, around half the trainees talked about training at work – in relation to others, both knowing more about how to train them and having more time to train them.

- Not blaming me if I forget. Need to recap, give me a sheet that shows the controls on the machine so I can look at again and memorise it. [Give me a] chance to review it and not just be told it once. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)
- Working with a larger crew rather than one person. Larger group, more people to approach, broader range of experience. A bit less time pressure. (M, 40-49, Pākehā)
- If they stuck with me all day – built up my confidence to work by myself. One-on-one time to show me the ropes. (M, 20-24, Māori)

The quality of training is underpinned by the extent to which there are people in the workplace who are able, qualified and available to train and assess trainees and apprentices; and the extent to which there is encouragement and support for training and the apprentice generally (Laporte and Mueller, 2011; Kopu, 2010). The availability of someone able to provide training was a key concern for the non-completers in this study, with 22 percent saying that ‘someone with more time at work to train me’ is what would have helped them complete. As noted previously in the report, around 40 percent of trainees mentioned working in busy workplaces, which resulted in little time for trainees to be shown what to do, let alone time for bookwork. This suggests both capacity and capability issues.

The majority of trainees (90 percent) also talked about other things that would have helped them and these relate to system and employer factors. Twenty percent of the comments were about 'time' – time at work to complete bookwork, or set times for training. This isn't surprising given what trainees have said about the lack of structured time for training at work and the need to ask for help. What is of interest is that 'time' is for bookwork, which calls into question what industry training really is. Is the bookwork to understand the theory – or is it about assessment of skills and knowledge? The comments from the trainees suggest it is the latter.

- For the qualification I needed time. When I was doing the asset plan, I worked really long hours for the job. Getting any study done or time on the qual was impossible. Seven days a week working 12-14 hour days. My partner made me stop. The marker of papers recognised the asset plan without having to do other stuff. Needed other time that I didn't have. No help from [ITO] – lots of emails, no recognition of why it's not happening. More understanding from the ITO would have been good. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)
- Time outside to read and complete assessments. Didn't need help to do them – it would just have been good to have some work-time to do it. No-one followed up with me – just the assessors. [And] knowing more about how assessments are relevant to the job and career. (F, 20-24, Pākehā)

These 'time' comments show the intersection between the employer and training system where the demands of the system requirements place an onus on trainees who are too busy with work or there is a lack of time at work to undertake the bookwork/assessment in work time.

More than half of trainees (60 percent) suggested they needed more help from their employers:

- more opportunities at work to undertake the requirements of the qualification or to learn at work
- more time and a structured approach to training
- more engagement and encouragement from employers with training
- more understanding from employers about what it takes to learn at work
- experts to work alongside trainees
- closer supervision or mentoring.

Trainees were also very aware that learning was often taking place within a busy work environment, where it was not always possible to provide what was required to support learning at work.

In addition to employment-related factors, around a third of the trainees thought factors beyond the workplace would have helped them. These system factors included the need for:

- more support from the ITO
- more information about assessments
- access to resources
- access to materials relevant to the job
- improved or more off-job provision.

Fewer trainees (eight percent) talked about how personal factors would have helped them, with three noting that as they were just going through the qualification for certification purposes they were not motivated to do it. Others talked about finding the questions hard, lack of motivation and family things made it difficult for them to continue. The lack of comment on what may have made a difference in terms of personal and family circumstances suggests trainees saw little that could help them in these regards.

For around 10 percent of the trainees, it was the interplay of factors that impacted on their training experience. These compounding employer, system and personal issues, just made it too difficult for them to complete.

- Being trained! Someone there you are training with all the time. They [employer] said they would get me into another company to do the things they couldn't cover. But that didn't happen. They helped the younger guys more. I was mature with four kids, pretty busy, so study had to go by the wayside to keep up with family sometimes. It would have been nice to have extra physics tuition. It would have been nice if the ITO had come around more. I didn't even see them more than once a year. It would have been nice if they talked with the employer and you if you needed some help to get everything done. (M, 50+, Pākehā)

There may be some quick-fixes for the training issues talked about, but the key issue for trainees is the bookwork – finding the time to do the bookwork in their own time and finding the content and assessment requirements too difficult.

Finally, in regards to training, the extent to which trainees are personally ready and able to undertake the study is important. Readiness is associated with motivation, previous qualification levels and existing skills, particularly relating to literacy and numeracy (Competenz, 2014; Vaughan, 2012; Smith, Walker and Brennan Kemmis, 2011; LSC, 2009). The fact that 80 percent of the trainees said they were motivated at the start of the training and 65 percent of them had qualifications at National Certificate Level 3/4 or above suggests they had the academic readiness to undertake and complete the qualifications they were working towards.

What would have helped trainees continue?

At the end of the interview trainees had the opportunity to make an overall comment about what would have helped them to complete the qualification. These comments, combined with their comments about their training experience and their reasons for not completing, are important for building the complete picture about the type of interventions that might have supported them and enabled them to complete.

Eight-five percent of trainees responded to this question, with just over a third of them talking about support – which is in keeping with their earlier responses about needing more support with study and the bookwork. They felt this support should come from employers, their ITOs and in a few cases from peers.

- I saw one of the sheet metal workers in the place next door to where I was working and in his training there was much more information about how he was supposed to be

progressing and how he was progressing. He seemed to have a lot more support than I got to keep things moving. I felt like I had to make it up myself on the fly. More support from my workplace would definitely have helped. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)

- Support is the main thing. For example, if I teamed up with someone from [ITO] – one person who can help you. A trainer as well as a manager. Felt fobbed off by [ITO] (F, 35-39, Pākehā)
- Some capacity to attend tutorials with other trainees and talk with them and some time with the tutor. (F, 50+ Pasifika)

Just under 20 percent made comments related to time. Most of these related to having more time at work to complete the bookwork or study in work hours. There was a sense the trainees weren't asking for a lot of time, just some time. However, for some it was obvious that as work was busy this would not have been possible.

- I could have found more time I guess. The paper was a bit more intense. The other two I could manage but now you had to do more research and I didn't have time to do that. I suppose like everything else, more time, some study time or time off would have helped. The ITO was supportive but I've got a huge workload. I'm quite happy I stopped; it was a relief. (M, 50+, Māori)

When the responses are categorised by employer, system and personal, over half (56 percent) commented on employer or employment factors. Over a third of the employer-related comments were in relation to employers needing to be more engaged with and understanding the trainees' needs and the training requirements; and needing to be more organised. This was followed by the points already made by trainees about the need for more time at work or more support at work.

Trainees also talked about the fact they could have completed if the company had stayed open or if their new employer had given them the opportunity to complete training. Only two trainees talked about more pay; and three about relevant work or workplace materials/data.

- Think I would be able to do it okay. The difficulty has been with changing farms... a lot of the work was done down south and it is now difficult to talk and work through that with my old boss. A lot of the info I need him to tell me stuff and don't want him to feel like he has another job to do. (M, 25-29, Pākehā)
- If [Employer] had paid for it, would have continued. Discussed with [Employer], but it was company policy for the employee to pay, and to be reimbursed on completion. (M, 20-24, Pākehā)

Around 40 percent of trainees made comments related to the training system. Here trainees wanted more support (including mentoring), someone in the ITO to talk to, materials they thought were more relevant, different resources or assessments, better organisation of ITO processes.

- Bring in an online component. Videos of someone talking. You don't need to be in a classroom – it's all in the materials. (M, 40-49, Pākehā)

- Probably, apart from losing my job, more support from the ITO. I know they are busy but we are the reason they have job. Even if they just dropped in for 10 minutes to chat. (F, 30-34, Pākehā)
- Better structured. Them working better with local poly so I can sit down and talk to someone about units. My tutor in Northland – had to ring – better local support would have really helped. (M, 30-34, Pākehā)
- The material needs to be more relevant. The ITO needs to be more in touch with the industry... I think [ITO] have lost their drive and reason for why their qualifications were first established. (M, 40-49, Pākehā)

The 18 percent of trainees who made comments related to personal factors talked about needing more time, needing more personal motivation, or simply, as already described above, that health or their family situation just got in the way.

The value of qualification completion to trainees

Another way to gauge the extent to which completion is important to the trainees is by looking at how they feel about giving up their training. This is measured by the extent to which they experience a sense of regret or relief in relation to non-completion. This also provides some understanding about the drive or incentive they may still have to continue with or undertake other qualifications. To ascertain the extent to which it did matter, the trainees have been categorised on a ‘regret to relief’ continuum. For nearly half the trainees (46 percent) giving up looks to have been a relief and for 40 percent there was a sense of regret in trainees’ responses. (See Figure 6 below).

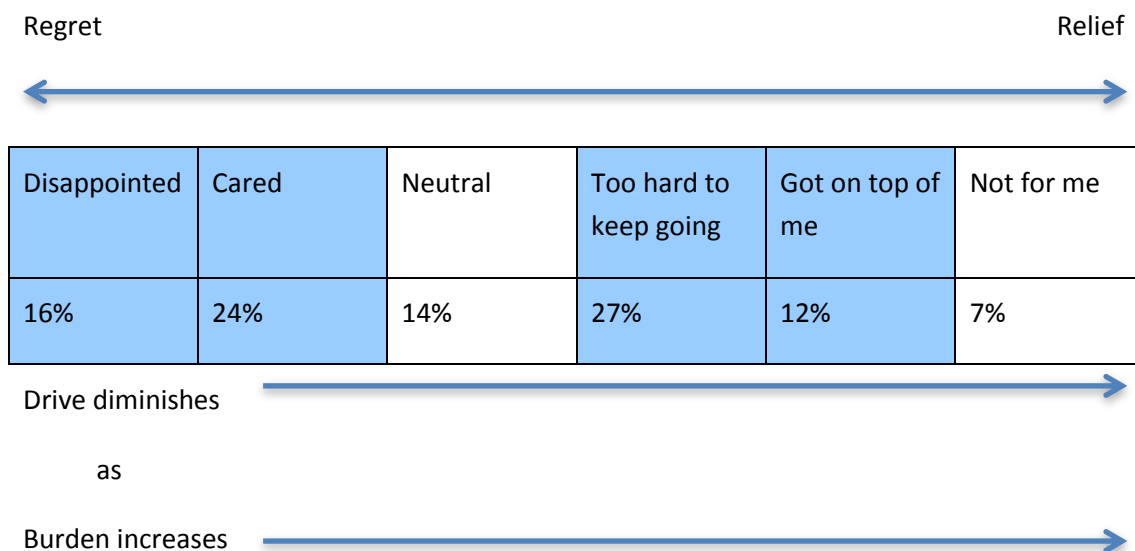


Figure 6: Non-completion – regret or relief? (N=114)

Regret was not a word used by the trainees; rather this concept is shown when trainees talked about ‘really wanting to finish’, or ‘being annoyed at not completing’. It is also shown in the references to being ‘willing to start again’ or that they are already re-enrolled in another qualification or in a new job with better prospects. For the 40 percent of trainees who expressed disappointment or caring about not completing there remains the real potential their motivation

could be re-ignited. Around a third of these trainees have already moved on to better opportunities and/or recommenced some training.

Those sitting in a 'neutral' position (neither cared that much, or felt a sense of relief at giving up), tended to show a relative lack of motivation, and while these are a small portion of all trainees many have remained in their existing jobs and life continues.

To the right of the continuum are the trainees for whom there is a sense of relief at giving up. The diminishing drive for completion occurs as a result of increasing barriers or the occurrence of tipping points faced by trainees often combined with the burden of also undertaking self-directed study in their own time. These 39 percent of trainees found it too hard to keep going and faced multiple factors that got in the way of completion, such that giving up became the better option, and a relief. It is interesting that only one of these trainees has moved on to a new job or training.

With those who found it 'too hard to keep going', there were those who just didn't have what they needed – be it time, someone to talk to, opportunity to practise and gather evidence. Some asked for help and had not got it. A smaller number of them experienced an even greater sense of relief. These were the trainees for whom multiple factors combined to just make it 'all too much'. These trainees faced personal or family stresses, as well as work and training problems.

The last group of trainees on the regret to relief continuum are those for whom the qualification 'wasn't for me' (7 percent). That they are placed at the relief end of the spectrum is about not being interested, not wanting to complete, perhaps having been enrolled in the wrong qualification. Overall, it didn't make much sense to these trainees and it was a relief to have stopped.

So, at a personal level non-completion did matter to many trainees, even in the year that they gave up. But the 'cost' of training for them was greater than any incentive or drive they had, extrinsic or intrinsic, to continue in that qualification.

Section Three: Discussion and conclusions

Section One of this report discusses the trainees' experiences of employment and workplace training. Their employment and training experiences are likely to be similar to those of many trainees who go on to successfully complete their qualifications. Section Two details why the trainees stopped their training and what they say would have helped to improve the training experience and subsequently continue. While for some there was an issue that acted as a tipping point for stopping training, for many there were factors that were cumulative and/or interacted with each other that interrupted their training and resulted in withdrawal.

Categorising from first principles the multiple reasons into whether they can be viewed as employer, system or personal factors illustrates the complex interaction of the reasons. As the table below shows some of these reasons are straightforward and fall into a single category, such as individual decisions that are external to either the training system or the employment relationship (such as moving towns, deciding to do something else) and these make up 21 percent of the total reasons given. Similarly, employer or system factors alone have been the primary reasons training ceased for some trainees (e.g. employer support/not the right training at work; training materials/lack of ITO support).

Other reasons can be seen as involving the interplay between the different types of factors. For example, pay rates are determined by both the labour market (the system) and the workplace; finding the training too hard is both a personal as well as a training system factor; personal circumstances and family commitments are impacted on by employer and training system factors where trainees don't have time to undertake learning and assessments outside of work time.

Many of the more complex stories have also included elements of poor communication, inadequate training support, weak administration systems, and uninterested or actively disruptive employers. These may be found where negative employer and system factors have merged. It is also in the overlap between all three types of factors where there is an inter-connection between all of the reasons given for ceasing training (this includes trainees having to do bookwork in their own time, at the end of tiring work days and around family or other responsibilities).

The table below illustrates how the reasons are distributed across the employer, system and trainee factors. When the percentages in each factor are combined it shows employer factors make the largest contribution to non-completion, which is in keeping with the findings of the literature scan (Alkema, 2015), followed by system factors and personal/trainee factors.

Table 1 Distribution of reasons for non-completion (N=158)

Reason	Percentage	Employer	System	Personal
Not paid enough	3%			
Training materials/ITO support	4%			
Employer/work related	4%			
Found the training too hard	5%			
Didn't get the right sort of training at work	6%			
Didn't get on with people at work	7%			
Lost job	7%			
Not enough support	16%			
Personal Decisions: didn't like the work, wanted to try something else, changed jobs, not motivated, moved towns	21%			
Personal circumstances/family commitments (life outside work)	28%			

Preventing non-completion

A proportion of withdrawals are unavoidable, particularly where a person decides they don't like the work or their workmates, or wants to try something new; in industries where there is low pay and/or high employment churn; or where employment mobility is an industry-related practice (e.g. dairying and forestry). In addition, it could be argued that for some of the trainees, the choice to leave an occupation that has not turned out as expected can be a sensible decision.

Nevertheless, there is 'avoidable non-completion'. The comments made by trainees about their training experience and their reasons for non-completion provide insight into the types of interventions that could be put in place to aid qualification completion.

Fundamental to addressing non-completion is an examination of what those with key roles in the training system might learn from this research about where and how they might intervene and support trainees to continue with their training.

The role of ITOs

Under the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Act 1992, ITOs are obliged to:

- (i) develop and maintain skill standards to be used in the assessment of trainees, and
- (ii) develop and maintain arrangements for the delivery of industry training that will enable trainees to achieve the relevant skill standards.

It can be argued that there is a degree of interpretation available in the wording of the second of these obligations; and that many of those interviewed as part of this research have effectively fallen between the cracks created by that ambiguity. The question arises: 'does developing and maintaining arrangements for the delivery of industry training' refer to simply the **mechanics and administration** of that training, or is there also a responsibility to ensure that a **supportive training environment** is also arranged?

The wide array of 'arrangements' that ITOs have developed within their respective industries is not being called into question. These must be fit-for-purpose for employers and trainees, and take account of the multiplicity of business and employment models across ITOs' industries. However, for those trainees who encountered either administrative glitches or unresponsiveness from their ITO, this suggests some deficiencies at the mechanical level of arranging training. Further, if the argument is accepted that ITOs also have a responsibility for ensuring there is a supportive training environment, then this has not happened. As discussed, only 20 percent of the trainees received optimal support. The others appear to have been placed in the position of undertaking tertiary-level study with minimal learning support, very little direct training, and often no dedicated time to learn. While ITOs do not deliver training this does not however abrogate their responsibility to quality assure the arrangements they have made for that training.

Recent amendments to the Industry Training Act (2014) signal an explicitly 'hands-on' role for ITOs, particularly in terms of individual training plans, and pastoral care and support. While these provisions are designed for a 'slice' of industry trainees (apprentices), who have been identified as requiring more support (i.e. often, but not exclusively, younger trainees, who are training towards longer, higher-level qualifications), but the data collected from the trainees in this study suggest that at least a modicum of this attention would benefit all trainees.

The administrative system

The administrative processes and the training environment are key areas for discussion. The first is indubitably within the ITOs' responsibility. The second, it could be argued, while crucially important to industry training, might be seen as a stretch too far for ITOs under the intent of the Industry Training Act. Nonetheless, while it is important to note that many of the components of both of these elements are interwoven with the role of the employer, there are aspects where the ITO has some control or leverage.

An industry trainee is participating in tertiary education. There is no reason why the administrative systems and structures that support any other tertiary student should not be available to industry trainees, albeit in a form that acknowledges they are sited in a workplace setting. Based on the

trainees' experiences, there are a number of points where engagement with the trainee would make a contribution to better support their completion.

The phases of engagement in training for an industry trainee set out in Table 2 describes how this may manifest itself (given the wide range of training arrangements that occur) and explore what good practice might look like.

Table 2: ITO administrative engagement arrangements

<p>Initiation: Trainee, employer, ITO or training provider may initiate training.</p> <p><i>Good practice:</i> Accessible information regarding the expectations, responsibilities and costs is made available to all parties so that trainees and employers understand the system.</p>
<p>Enrolment: The formal enrolment process may capture only the minimum regulatory requirements or may be a structured engagement that sets good training systems and processes in place.</p> <p><i>Good practice:</i> All involved parties are present when the training agreement is signed; and expectations, responsibilities and costs are made explicit and agreed to. These are recorded and made freely available to all parties, including relevant monitoring requirements.</p>
<p>Training delivery: On- and off-job requirements are clearly articulated.</p> <p><i>Good practice:</i> Where possible, off-job obligations, including dates and times, are scheduled and signed-off as early as possible, to allow for planning. On-job requirements, including work organisation, the range of tasks required, and collection of evidence requirements are also made explicit and monitored.</p>
<p>Assessment: Assessment models are authentic, fit-for-purpose and take account of the learner profile and workplace requirements. Assessment expectations are clearly explained and exemplars are provided.</p> <p><i>Good practice:</i> Models are fully communicated to all parties involved. Expectations and exemplars are freely available in a variety of formats.</p>
<p>Complaints or issues: There is a robust, accessible and well-publicised complaints process.</p> <p><i>Good practice:</i> Complaints are acknowledged and resolved in a transparent and timely way.</p>
<p>Completion: The trainee and employer are informed when the trainee is near to completion and at the point of completion.</p> <p><i>Good practice:</i> Any barriers to completion are proactively identified and overcome.</p>
<p>Follow-up: If the trainee withdraws, ITO follow-up confirms the withdrawal, and checks in</p>

again within a reasonable period of time to see if reconnection with the programme is a possibility.

Good practice: The ITO carries out analysis of follow-up procedures and outcomes. Re-engagement with training is made as straightforward as possible.

Assessment of learning

There is one area that requires more than adjustments to the administration system and this is the assessment of learning. Bookwork was the most commented on burden for trainees, particularly in terms of their lack of time to complete it outside of work. Some of the bookwork undertaken by trainees will be supporting their understanding of the theoretical components of their study. Much of it however appears to be for assessment purposes and serious consideration needs to be given to assessment approaches that are more authentic and manageable for the trainees.

The reliance on bookwork and the resultant written evidence is somewhat at odds with how many ITOs describe their assessment practices in relation to a collection of naturally occurring evidence. In theory the gathering of naturally occurring evidence (e.g. digitally, work diaries, job sheets) should be a practicable approach in workplaces which by their very nature lend themselves to authentic assessment activities. Reliability may be an issue where a number of different assessors are used, but moderation practices will address this. Validity is not an issue as long as the right evidence and a sufficient amount of it is collected, the right criteria are used to judge performance, and the most appropriate assessment methods are used (Vaughan and Cameron, 2009, 2010a, 2010b).

The challenge for ITOs is to design and use assessment practices and processes that adhere to the assessment principles of being timely, fair, authentic, valid and reliable (Vaughan & Cameron, 2010b), while at the same time keeping the practices and processes manageable for themselves, employers and trainees. Herein lies the tension. While bookwork assessment is manageable and convenient for ITOs (and possibly employers) as a means by which to measure trainees' knowledge and skills, it was not the case for trainees in the study, and possibly other trainees who do not complete their qualifications.

As discussed earlier, workplaces are authentic learning contexts and as such evidence collection should not be problematic if trainees have access to appropriate resources and opportunities to practise and present evidence of what they are doing. Therefore, there are three ways to reduce the bookwork burden:

- Firstly, for those employees who have been doing the job for quite some time and are looking for qualifications for credentialing purposes, Credit Transfer or Assessment of Prior Learning (APL)⁹ processes should be used more widely.

⁹ APL is also referred to as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Recognition of Current Competence (RCC).

- Secondly, in large workplaces there is the opportunity to integrate workplace training and industry training so trainees do not need to double-up on learning and assessment.
- Thirdly, alternative evidence collection and presentation methods should be used. For example, visual material taken directly from the workplace is in keeping with the ideal of naturally occurring evidence, and evidence may also be orally presented.

The role of employers

The role of the employer is fundamental to the industry training system. In the more traditional apprenticeship model of training, the employer bears the cost of training the novice, recouping that investment as the novice gains skills and is able to be ‘charged out’ at an increasingly higher rate than he or she is paid. While this model still applies in some areas of industry training, in others the ‘cost’ of training for employers (qualification fees, workplace trainers and assessors, resources, backfill etc.) is recouped through greater productivity, less wastage, regulatory compliance and so on. It seems clear, however, in the employment situations of some trainees, the employer had either not made the connection to the benefits of training, or simply didn’t care. This is in spite of them being positive about training and qualifications.

As described in Section One, most trainees reported positive experiences, with largely supportive employers. It is important however not to ignore the voices of those for whom unsupportive employers and difficult employment relationships had an impact on their non-completion. Here the lack of support was manifested in disengagement from the learning process, inconsistent attention to training, poor work organisation and a small number of employers who were actively disruptive to their trainees’ learning achievement.

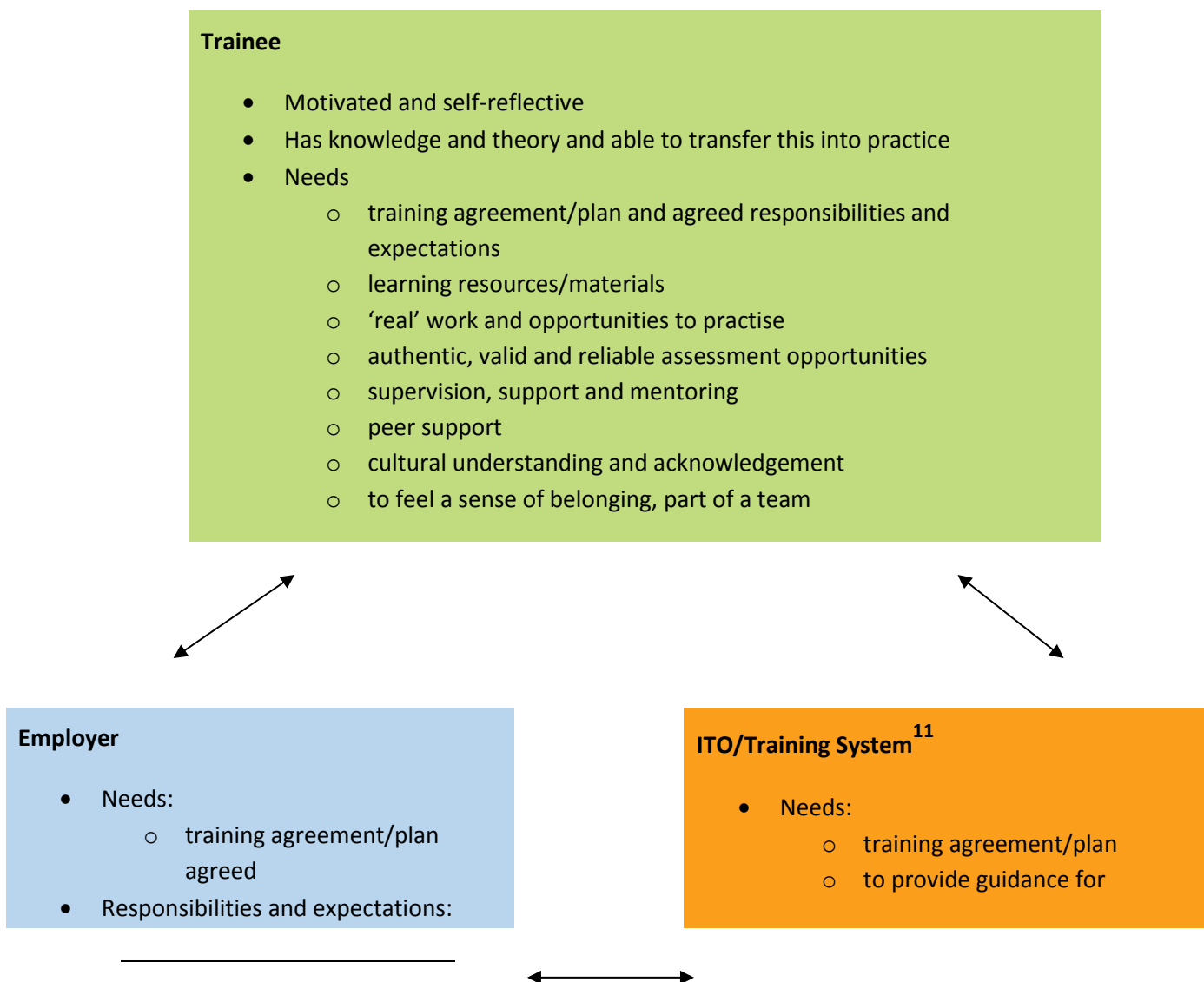
The nature of the industry and the employment relationships within it can also contribute to difficulties with qualification completion. A few trainees reported they were self-employed or in a contracting situation, which implies a more tenuous relationship with the workflow required to complete all aspects of a qualification. Others worked in highly mobile industries, for example, forestry workers who move quite fluidly between contractors and areas, depending on work and location choices, and who dip in and out of industry training depending on their employers. Their description of training involves getting ‘tickets’ for various activities, rather than working towards a qualification (although they do understand this may be an outcome).

A key issue for the trainees in this study was the lack of capacity employers have to deliver and support training. This has been contributed to by the busy nature of the workplaces and is likely to have been exacerbated by the small size of the majority of the workplaces. Bednarz (2014) found that the highest completion rates can be found in larger workplaces as these tend to have greater capacity to train, can offer structured training programmes and support good working conditions. There is an underlying assumption in workplace learning contexts that workplaces have capacity and also the capability to provide valuable learning experiences (Alkema & McDonald, 2014a). The extent to which that assumption is founded in what actually happens in the work environment to develop skills and knowledge for trainees warrants further examination.

Learning in the workplace

While the ITO has the lead administrative role, everyone has a role and responsibility in the learning system. Given this learning primarily takes place, or should take place, within the workplace it requires the employer, ITO, and trainee to work in partnership to improve the likelihood of qualification completion.

Drawing on the features of successful workplace learning identified within this partnership from other New Zealand research¹⁰, Figure 7 expands on the good practices associated with supportive and enabling workplace learning environments.



¹⁰ Diagram adapted from Alkema & McDonald (2014), pg 6.

¹¹ Table 2: ITO administrative engagement arrangements on page 49 sets out the administrative foundation for these features to support successful workplace learning.

- knowledge about learning and assessment (including feedback)
- a structured approach to supervision, support and mentoring
- cultural understanding
- Provides:
 - encouragement for and interest in trainees' progress
 - capable training and advice
 - resources
 - real work and formal structures and processes to support it
 - affordances – time to learn, practise and transfer theory to practice
 - an inclusive learning environment

- learners
- a structured approach to supervision, support and mentoring
- to work in collaboration with learners and workplaces
- Provides:
 - authentic, valid and reliable assessments
 - resources/learning materials to support the learner
 - clarity around roles, responsibilities and expectations
 - responsive and proactive engagement with employer/trainee

Figure 7: Features of successful workplace learning

The role of the trainee

The trainees also have a role to play in the industry training system. They are not just recipients of knowledge and skills. They need to be active participants with a level of motivation, persistence and commitment that support them to persevere when the learning and work environment is less than optimal. However, that said, the trainees are often in environments where, while they largely felt valued and were able to exert some control, there were power relationships at play that were employer-dominated, necessitating a degree of trainee resilience and determination.

Conclusion

It is important to keep in mind that industry training is a 'partnership' (although that term implies a level of power equality that was not always shown to be the case) between the trainee, the employer and the ITO. There are three main components to the system that each singularly and in combination impact on the likelihood of qualification completion.

First, the characteristics of the individual trainee, set within their family and community environment, taking account of their past educational and work experiences. In this area, consideration needs to be given to their readiness, capacity, capability (including literacy and numeracy skills) and motivation to engage in training; the realities of busy and demanding work,

family and community responsibilities; and the 'cost/benefit analysis' that they conduct (sometimes quite explicitly) about the benefits of engaging in training.

Second, the workplace/employment environment in which the training occurs. There are several dimensions to this component. First, there is the level of involvement of the employer, further complicated by the fact that depending on the size and structure of the employing organisation, the 'employer' may not be the person with whom the trainee engages. The face of training for the trainee could be the HR person, a training coordinator, a supervisor, a branch manager, or a workmate who is one step ahead in their training. The interviews reveal a level of organisational awareness of training that varies from an intimate day-to-day involvement (almost a master and apprentice model) through to organisations where there appears to be only a minimal or peripheral awareness that national qualification training is even taking place.

The second dimension for the workplace is the extent to which the employer has the capability and capacity to both train and support trainees. There are three aspects to this: the time, personnel and material/resource support provided for training within work time; the way attendance at any off-job training provision is supported and encouraged; and (of vital importance) the way the work is organised to provide opportunities for trainees to experience the elements required to complete training requirements, to practise and utilise the skills they may have acquired during training, and to challenge and excite them as their proficiency grows.

The third dimension is the employment relationship itself. In a few cases, it is fair to say the employment environment was unhealthy, but in more cases, the trainees' dissatisfaction appears to have been the result of training being an added activity to an already busy workload, or the employer not fully grasping the level of commitment required to meaningfully support training. Of particular interest is the range of employment relations reported by trainees – certainly the novice or young employee, increasing their skill level and experience via industry training, appears to be the exception, with a credentialing of existing skills being a common experience.

The final component is the nature of the training and the systems that support it. A key point to consider in this component is that the question 'How did you learn to do your job?' and the statement 'Tell us about the training you were doing', appear in many cases to be quite unrelated. Many of the trainees described their training more in terms of completing assessments relating to work activities that they already knew how to do. The training required in these cases was help to complete assessments in the style required to achieve the unit standards, or to collect appropriate evidence – getting 'signed-off'.

It is also clear the role of the ITO is very often behind the scenes – the trainees usually had an awareness of the ITO, but the key relationship was often with an off-job tutor, or a workplace assessor. As the role of the ITO is to arrange training, this is completely appropriate, but it can lead to confusion on the part of the trainee, and murky reporting and accountability lines.

This study, drawing on trainee experience of non-completion, points to four main areas for further work:

1. An examination of good practice in ITOs' administration of trainee engagement arrangements.
2. Consideration of authentic and manageable assessment approaches for trainees.
3. Guidance and support for workplaces to create positive on-job learning environments.
4. Research into good practice in the development of skill and knowledge of trainees within workplace settings.

The value of a qualification

So is there value in gaining a qualification for trainees, the employers and ITOs? Is the value proposition sufficient for each of these groups to drive and support qualification completion? The wider body of research discussed earlier in this report suggests there is as it talks about qualification completion contributing positively to individual earnings, employment rates, employment stability and productivity.

However, the trainees in this study do not see qualifications in these ways. They think about the value of the qualification for their present and future lives. They weigh this against the personal cost (the burden) and when it all becomes too much they let it go. In addition, when a qualification is not valued by the employer and does not result in any improvement in pay or conditions, then there seems to be limited value in the trainee investing time and effort. This is in spite of any personal satisfaction and labour market currency it may bring them. That said, for the most part completion did matter to the trainees. Amongst those who regretted not completing, most have moved on to different jobs or qualifications. For those who felt a sense a relief at stopping their training, it wasn't that they did not value completion, rather completing became too difficult a proposition for them.

For the employer, the value of a qualified worker is paramount when there are regulatory, compliance or contractual implications. The trainees were aware their employers generally valued qualifications with around 60 percent of them saying their employers thought getting a qualification was important. However, given that 70 percent of the trainees also said a qualification was not required for their current job there appears to be little incentive for employers to push for and support qualification completion.

For ITOs, the value lies in the contribution they make to workforce development and in providing what the industry requires for productivity and economic growth. It also lies in providing the structure and pathways for career progression. In turn the development of a pool of qualified workers allows for lower transaction costs when recruiting, as industry-mandated qualifications act as a powerful skill proxy. A qualified workforce also helps build a sense of vocational solidity or professionalism.

For the trainees in this study, non-completion does not mean they have given up thinking about their futures. Non-completion was just a point in time and there are other options available for them to pursue.

- Not sure what will do in the future. Wouldn't mind driving trucks and if I change my mind I could do an adult apprenticeship. I told the guys why I stopped and they were gutted but I had made up my mind. (M, 20-24, Māori)

- Half way through I realised I didn't want to do it forever. Loved it, but not lifelong. Another job presented itself and I decided to do it. A better career move. (F, 20-24, Māori)

That said, employers and ITOs have a responsibility to ensure non-completion does not become a pattern in these people's lives. At the right time, with the right working conditions, learning materials and support, trainees can complete their qualifications.

- I still want to do it. The family is sorted now – could do it now. Still have the books and look at them. I need a bit more support from the team – a bit more than two hours a week. (F, 40-49, Pākehā)

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Appendix A: Research Approach

The purpose of the research was to find out from non-completing trainees their reasons for non-completion. It focussed on non-completers from 10 ITOs who were studying at levels 3 and 4 on the NZQF. It is primarily a qualitative study. It was informed by the experience of non-completion from ITOs and from a literature scan on the completion/non-completion of traineeships/apprenticeships.

A Project Team from the Industry Training Federation and three ITOs governed the research. The research team also reported to a Reference Group made up representatives from 10 ITOs and two government agencies (Tertiary Education Commission and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment).

Key Questions

- What factors/reasons contribute to the non-completion of Level 3 and 4 qualifications by apprentices and trainees?
- How are these factors/reasons enacted in practice (processes and behaviours)?

Sub questions:

- What **system** factors contribute to non-completion and how do these play out?
- What **workplace/employment** factors contribute to non-completion and what do these look like in practice?
- What **personal** factors contribute to non-completion?

Data collection

Literature Scan

The research started with a literature scan. The literature included research reports, articles and media resources that could be sourced electronically or from government agencies about non-completion. It was limited to material from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Germany that has been written in the last 10 years. The research included the perspectives of employers, apprentices/trainees, government agencies and researchers. Of the 39 studies in the scan, around half of them (18) include primary data, with 13 of these including data from trainees, the majority of whom were still in training.

The literature scan was written up as a small thematic study and the findings used to inform the research tools.

Screening Tool

A challenge for this research was to access non-completing trainees. To this end, Heathrose Research designed a short screening tool. Nine ITOs then either emailed a weblink to the screening tool to withdrawn trainees or phoned them and completed the screening tool through a short interview.

Essentially quantitative in nature, the screening tool asked trainees their reasons for non-completion, what they were doing now, and for demographic data. Trainees were also asked if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview and 273 of the 488 who responded agreed.¹² Trainees from each ITO were offered a small incentive to go in a draw for one of ten \$50 supermarket vouchers. Screening tool results are not discussed in this report as the tool's primary purpose was to get voluntary participants for the interviews.

Sample of non-completers

The sample to be interviewed was selected from the 273 non-completers who volunteered through the screening tool. The number to be interviewed was based on the percentage of non-completers from each of the ITOs, based on 2014 non-completion data for all ITOs. High screening tool participation rates from PrimaryITO, Careerforce, and ServiceIQ meant that a systematic approach to sampling, with an over sampling of Māori, was possible for these ITOs. With the other ITOs the sample was taken based on those who had agreed to participate in interviews. In other words, it was essentially a self-selected sample.

A target of around 150 interviews was set for this research, with 114 being achieved. The reasons for the gap are:

- Insufficient responses from trainees in three ITOs (despite the ITOs' best efforts).
- Potential interviewees declining to be interviewed.
- Contact not able to be made with interviewees who had agreed to be interviewed (despite researchers' best efforts).

The sample included trainees from:

- Hospitality, retail, fitness and healthcare – ServiceIQ, Skills Active, Careerforce (36%)
- Primary industries – PrimaryITO (22%)
- Technical and trades – BCITO, Competenz, Connexis, HITO, MITO, Skills Org (40%)

There is an oversample from Careerforce. This occurred because of a high response rate from trainees over a short time period. In contrast, BCITO, Competenz, Skills Active and the Skills Organisation are under-represented in the sample.

To establish the extent to which the interview sample was comparable to the overall population of non-completers, we compared it to demographic data supplied by seven ITOs.¹³ This showed the sample was representative from an ethnicity and gender perspective.

¹² The withdrawn trainees who completed the screening tool came from: Primary ITO (218); Careerforce (86); Service IQ (54); Competenz (33); Skills Org (31); Skills Active (22); HITO (21); MITO (20); BCITO (3).

¹³ We asked the 10 ITOs for data they held on non-completion. Seven ITOs supplied data that included ethnicity data, with six of them also supplying gender data.

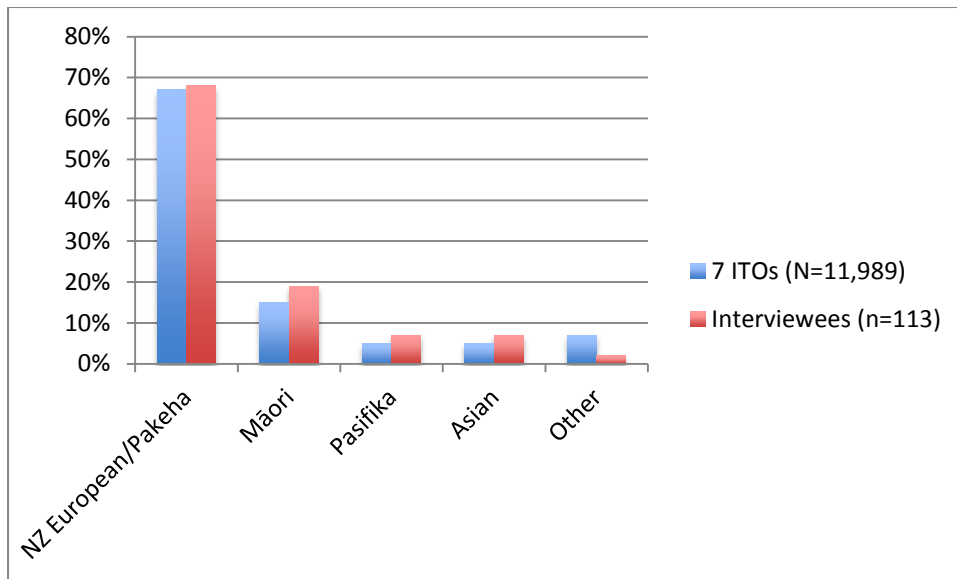


Figure A1: Ethnicity of interviewees relative to withdrawn trainees

Qualitative Interviews

Five researchers conducted structured phone interviews with trainees. The interviews lasted, on average, between 20-30 minutes. The interview schedule was established based on the themes from the literature scan. It consisted of questions based around:

- Training (why they started; training on and off job; how training might have been improved; support they received while training).
- Workplace (size, culture, pay rates).
- Personal factors (motivation, circumstances).
- Reasons for non-completion.
- Demographic data.

While the interviews were structured, many of the questions were open and there were many opportunities for individuals to provide comments. Interviewers took verbatim notes and entered these into an online database during the interview.

As a thank you for their contribution to the research, each trainee who participated was given a \$20 phone top up at the conclusion of the interview.

Data analysis

The unit of analysis for this work is the non-completers themselves. An inductive analysis approach was used for the interview data. This meant extensive and repeated readings of the data set, firstly as a whole, then by theme, then by sub-groups. The latter included: Māori; Pasifika; 15-24 year olds; 40+ year olds; those studying at Level 3; those studying at Level 4. The data were coded and this then enabled us to ascertain the extent to which themes or patterns held true or differed across sub-groups and to subsequently determine whether there needed to be specific interventions for sub-groups.

We also conducted an exploratory analysis of the reasons for non-completion to ascertain the extent to which there were relationships between different reasons. However, as no robust clusters emerged we did not pursue this analysis.

Ethics

The ethical standards used for this research were informed by the Australasian Evaluation Society: *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*.¹⁴ Standard protocols were used to inform interviewees about what they could expect from the research.

At the start of the interview they were:

- thanked for agreeing to be interviewed
- told the interview would take 20-30 minutes
- told that what they said would remain confidential to Heathrose Research and that they would not be identified in any reports or publications
- told they could withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Advantages and limitations of the research approach

Given the qualitative approach to this research, it includes a relatively small sample. As such, we cannot say the findings are generalisable to the population of 11,989 non-completers from the 10 ITOs in 2014. The sample was also self-selected, rather than a random sample of the population of non-completers. However, this was driven by the need to be able to access non-completers.

The strengths of the research are:

- Working closely with the Project Group and with ITOs to collect data meant Heathrose had access to quality data and a sample of non-completers. It also means the research team has been able to have informed input and questions from subject matter experts.
- The research has been data rich and data informed – by the literature scan, the screening tool, ITO non-completion data and qualitative interview data.
- The interviewed non-completers had recently exited their qualifications (2014) so their experience was fresh in their minds.
- The qualitative interview data was rich and covered all the aspects related to their non-completion.
- Capturing the data as closely as possible verbatim, privileges the voice of the recently exited trainees. We are very aware that some of the trainee commentary will be challenging to ITOs and employers, and that in many cases there will be an explanation or ‘other side of the story’. Nonetheless, the trainees shared their reality and lived

14 <http://www.aes.asn.au/membership-ethical-guidelines.html>

experiences with the interviewers, and it is their perceptions and words that underpin this research.

Appendix B: Interviewees' demographic data

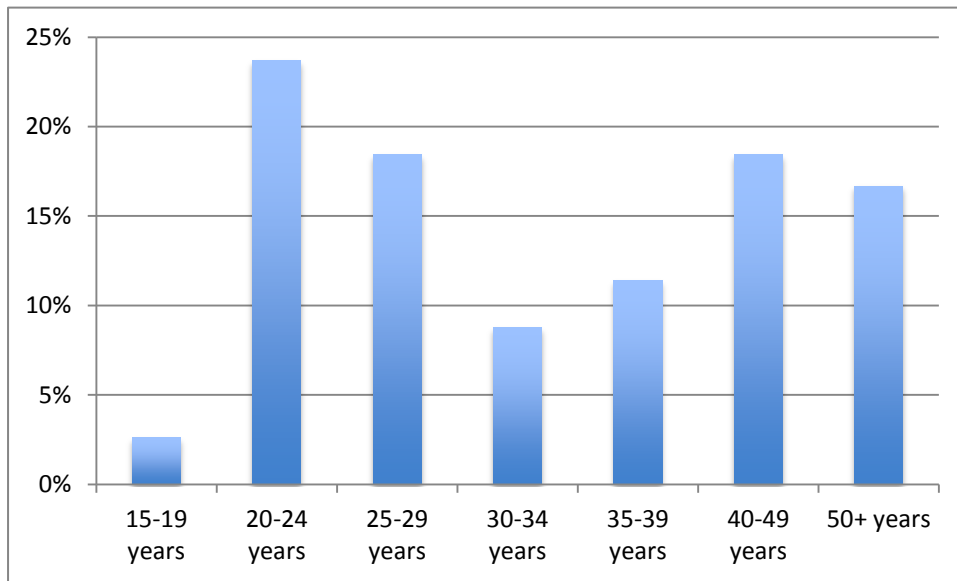


Figure B1: Age of interviewees (N=114)

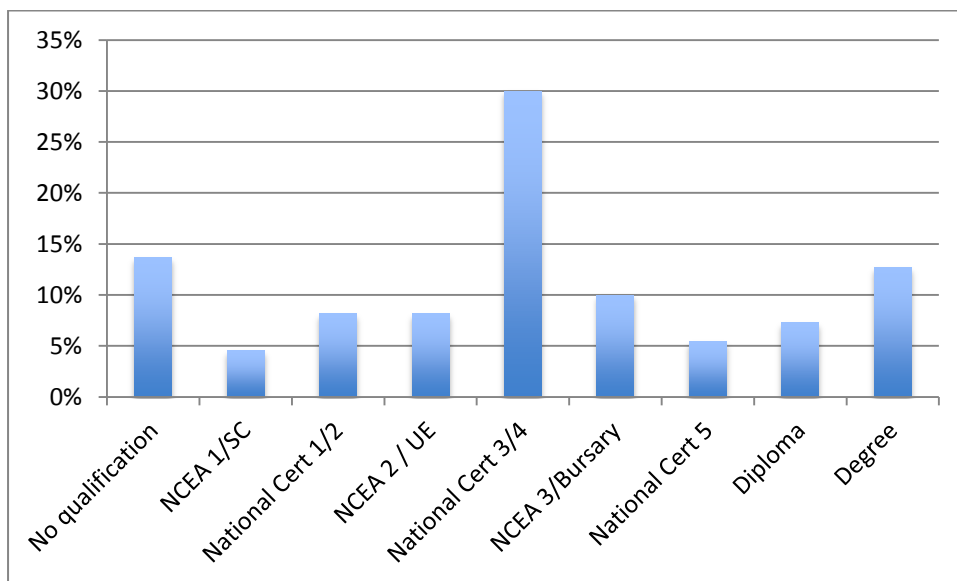


Figure B2: Highest qualification (n=110)